

**An Archdemon's
Dilemma: How
to Love Your Elf
Bride: Volume 2**

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AN
ARCHDEMON'S
DILEMMA: HOW TO
LOVE YOUR
ELF BRIDE

2

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"Master Zagan, she's still a child."

A small child's face was under the mask. Moreover, it was a girl. She had pale green hair like the sprouts of spring. Since her eyes were closed, he couldn't see their color, but he did notice that she had long eyelashes. Her lips were a lively pink, and perhaps because she was wrapped up in a bulky robe, her cheeks were flushed.

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Nephelia

An elf with snow-white hair. Her nickname is Nephly. Even among the elves, who possessed a high level of mana, her's was extraordinarily high, so she was treated as a 'blessed child'. Little by little, she grows to feel affection for Zagan, who told her that 'he needed her'.

Zagan

An orphan who was abducted by a certain sorcerer as a child, but then slaughtered him and stole all his assets and knowledge. After falling in love with Nephly at first sight and purchasing her, he worries over how to properly convey his feelings.

Valefor

A young dragon who attacked Zagan to steal his knowledge: powers because she desires strength. Her nickname is Foll. After Zagan turns the tables on her, she is forced to stay at the castle and help Nephly with chores.

Chastille Lillqvist

A girl who inherited a Sacred Sword, and earned the title Maiden of the Sacred Sword. Though she is a master of the blade, she is far too serious and thus easily deceived. After failing to subjugate a sorcerer, she was saved by Zagan, and is now conflicted by her feelings for him, a sorcerer who is made out to be evil.





**"I shall
no longer
waver. So
lend me
your power—
Sacred
Sword
Azrael!"**

**The Flames of
Purification...
were a light this
time. A pale light
coiled about the
blade. However,
it didn't feel
transient at all.**

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Prologue

“Chastille Lillqvist — thine authority as an Archangel is hereby indefinitely suspended.”

As the head of the church’s Kianoides branch, Chastille’s direct superior, Cardinal Clavwell, informed her of her punishment three days ago. In reality, it was a command of penitence, but she wasn’t being restrained.

Having already lost her place in the church, Chastille was just aimlessly staggering down a street in Kianoides. Eventually, she arrived at a place where she once reunited with a certain girl.

“I’m rather... foolish, huh?” And all alone, she muttered those words to herself.

Chastille had no Sacred Sword on her back, and wasn’t even wearing the proof that she was an Angelic Knight, her Anointed Armor. The three knights who served as her subordinates offered to escort her, but she turned them down flat. After all, as she was now, she was just a normal person.

Half a month ago, a new Archdemon was born. His name was Zagan. Sorcerer Slayer Zagan.

An Archdemon was not a king of monsters, demons, or anything of the sort, as the name may have implied. Instead, it was the name given to those who had reached the very heights of sorcery. They were individuals that the church had to hunt down with all their might, their mortal enemies.

However, Chastille rejected the duty of subjugating that Archdemon. On the contrary, she raised an objection and argued that Zagan was someone they should not fight. And as a result, she lost everything that gave her a sense of belonging.

Even after all this, I’m sure Zagan would never thank me.

He wasn’t one to desire the help of an enemy. In fact, she doubted he even knew of the concept of gratitude in more ordinary circumstances. He did nothing but believe in his own power, and was a man who used that power to cast aside anything he found irrational.

Still, I wanted to do something for his sake. Chastille herself wasn’t sure whether that was because he had saved her life twice already, or for some other reason.

She would likely be snuffed out sooner or later. There was no way the church would just allow a former Archangel to live freely. No, she

was sure taking care of her would even be a higher priority than subjugating Archdemons.

She became an enemy of the organization that was hell bent on exterminating sorcerers. The mere thought of that fact made her blood run cold. From the beginning, Chastille had a timid personality. And yet, curiously enough, she didn't feel any sense of regret. Chastille stood strong and didn't waver in the face of authority, so she wanted to be proud of that.

Zagan remembering her would be thanks enough. The only thing in his heart was that white-haired elven girl, and the thought of forcing herself in there never once crossed her mind.

At the very least, though, she wanted to watch them pass their time in peace, and eventually, see them raise a happy family. If they did that, then them remembering her every once in a while was more than enough for her.

As that rather depressing wish grew stronger, she saw their figures rise up in front of her eyes. It was the young man with his usual evil countenance, and the elven girl. Plus, there was an adorable girl in between them holding each of their hands. She was a lovely young girl with a nasty look in her eyes, which made one think of Zagan.

"Well, that damn Zagan would surely become a doting father." Chastille knew that man was essentially kind at heart.

"Are you... pleased with those clothes?"

"Mm... Thank you, Zagan."

Those sure sounded like the words of an awkward father... Was it an auditory hallucination? Having even heard that kind of voice, Chastille finally came to her senses.

"Z-Zagan?" Finding it unbelievable that she would happen across them at such a time, Chastille unintentionally raised a hysteric voice.

And with that, they likely also realized she was there. The young man then returned her gaze.

It wasn't a hallucination. And yet, just what was going on? There was a small, young girl between the two of them.

"N-No way... you two... have already gotten close enough to be blessed with a child...?"

Seeing Chastille's utter shock, the young man's face became remarkably red.

"D-D-D-D-D-Don't say such shameless things! Nephy and I have yet to, um..." And then, he exchanged glances with the elven girl next to him, which made them both turn their faces away in a fluster.

It almost felt like he was showing off, which made Chastille want to hit him.

And while both of them were shaken, the little girl pointed her finger at Chastille.

“Zagan, who’s that?” She still had an undeveloped tone, but her voice seemed to contain both trust and affection.

The young man then nodded to the girl, and turned to face Chastille. Would his eyes contain a pleasant look of nostalgia, or perhaps a sense of unease due to their previous positions? A sound unintentionally rang out as Chastille gulped.

And then, what the young man said was—

“Oh, right, who *are* you?”

With a snap, some sort of thread within Chastille was severed. *It can’t be... There’s no way he doesn’t remember me, right...!?* Wasn’t that going a bit too far? And, as one would expect, Chastille was unable to hold back her tears.

Let us go back to several days ago in order to properly explain this situation.

Chapter I: Even an Archdemon Shouldn't Beat a Child

“‘Sigil of the Archdemon,’ huh?”

Zagan muttered that name to himself in his castle's archives, where his collection of books had constantly continued to grow.

Yes, everything in there belonged to Zagan. He already had a considerable book collection to begin with, but there were now piles of books on the floor that wouldn't fit into the bookshelves.

About half a month ago, Zagan inherited the legacy of his predecessor, Archdemon Marchosias. And the piles of books on the floor were but a small portion of it. He only brought over things related to what he wished to research, but even that seemed to be too much.

Zagan, who was sweeping up his bangs as if he were tired, was at the ripe young age of eighteen. His long black hair, which he had not groomed at all, was tied up behind him, and he wore a robe lined with red cloth. On top of that, his silver eyes, as well as the eternally sinister expressions on his face further increased the overbearing sense he gave off.

Zagan was a sorcerer who held the title Archdemon. And right now, he had something that he had to do.

“I can't really find any clues...”

There was a certain ‘something’ called demons that once existed in this world. No, right now they were only hiding themselves, and likely still existed somewhere. Just the other day, Zagan encountered one of them.

There wasn't a huge gap between them, but it was still not an opponent he could defeat. Or at least, that was how it should have been, yet Zagan still survived by some stroke of luck.

As he stuck out his right hand, a sigil floated up there, looking something like a letter. This was the Sigil of the Archdemon. And a demon bowed its head and obeyed its bearer.

There is a need for me to understand this thing's true nature, then. It was a power that could even repel a demon. However, it was different from any sorcery crest that Zagan knew about.

He suspected that there may have been some sort of clue within the preceding Archdemon's legacy, but the results didn't look favorable.

“...Phew.” After pouring over them all morning, Zagan returned the books he pulled off the bookshelves to where they belonged. Even appetite and sleep could be freely manipulated by sorcerers, so the concept of fatigue essentially didn’t exist.

Still, willpower wasn’t something any sorcery could control. Depression and mental exhaustion were utterly unavoidable. And so, just as Zagan let out a breath, thinking of taking a little break due to that fact... he suddenly sensed that the door behind him had opened.

Nephy, huh?

It was the name of the girl who was Zagan’s disciple, servant, and... the one he loved from his heart. She was his only housemate.

Nephy was an elven girl. In ancient times, her race was called the fairies of Norden, a race whose characteristic feature was their pointed ears. And among those, Nephy possessed snow-white hair, which meant she possessed especially strong mana.

That long hair was adorned with a deep crimson ribbon, and her small facial features were accented by her large azure eyes. Wrapped around her dainty body was a white apron and a one piece dress, the uniform of a maid, and she also wore boots which had sorcery to reduce fatigue cast on them, but this was just her regular attire.

As Zagan shifted his attention to the sky through the window, he saw that the sun had already passed its peak. It appeared that Nephy had come to call him down for lunch.

However, since Zagan was facing a bookshelf, she was probably keeping quiet so that she wouldn’t get in his way. And yet, the presence behind him was slowly and quietly getting closer.

Is she maybe... trying to surprise me? After a certain incident passed, Nephy ended up calling him Master Zagan instead of just Master. That made him feel they were now more intimate, if only slightly.

There was a possibility that she came by to surprise Zagan as a joke. And of course, Zagan was no fool who would ruin her fun.

Now then, what’s she gonna do to me? While putting all his effort into pretending not to notice her, he remained there restlessly as the presence right behind him stretched out their hands.

However, there was about a head in difference between Zagan and Nephy’s height. Adding on to that fact, because he was probing around the archives, he was standing on a step ladder.

“Guess whoooo... Huh? I can’t reach...” The hands she stretched out only reached as far as Zagan’s shoulders.

As Zagan turned around, the figure of a girl who was greatly perplexed since she couldn’t reach his face came into view.

And around her neck was a boorish collar. Though it no longer had the power to seal mana as it once did, it was the precious collar of vows between Zagan and Nephy.

After a while of her fidgeting, Nephy's ears became a bright red all the way to their pointy tips.

"Um, what to do...?" Nephy said that as if at a complete loss. Her face looked as expressionless as ever, but her lips were quivering, and she had tears floating up in the corner of her eyes. Above all else, the tips of her pointy ears were quivering as if saying that she was unable to bear the shame.

It seemed even she was unable to endure the embarrassment of the situation.

No, seriously, what do I even do here!? He wanted to embrace her and rub his cheek against hers, but Zagan's spirit was not so strong that he could do such a daring thing to the girl he liked.

As Nephy gripped her apron tightly, she muttered something while letting her gaze wander.

"Um, you see... I was thinking... maybe I could surprise you, Master Zagan..."

"Surprise me, and then what?"

"Oh, um, I hadn't... Thought that far ahead."

It seemed she just wanted to try it.

Nephy's ears twitched repeatedly on short intervals as she replied while stuttering, and seeing her like that made Zagan want to slam his head against the wall.

What exactly are you planning to do to me by being so cute!? Zagan had many things he wanted to say like, 'Even if you don't do something like that, I'm surprised by your cuteness,' or, 'I was so surprised that I wanted to embrace you,' but after taking a deep breath, he managed to calm himself down. And then, he cleared his throat out with a cough.

"I see. It's time to eat, right Nephy?"

"Yes. Preparations for lunch have been completed, Master Zagan."

They left the archives behind, red in the face all the while.

This was an ordinary, everyday occurrence for the two.



The dining hall was a large room with an enormous table that could seat twenty people around it.

A deep crimson carpet was spread out on the floor, and an extravagant chandelier hung down from the ceiling. There was also a fireplace installed along the wall, which would definitely have been put to use if it was just a little colder.

Up until just a month ago, this room was overrun with cobwebs, skeletons, and torture devices, but now it was so clean that it was beyond recognition. The change was all thanks to Nephy's effort.

"It really is beyond recognition here, too." As Zagan

unintentionally muttered those words, Nephy nodded bashfully.

"It is the room that you take your meals in after all, Master Zagan."

"I-I see. Though, wasn't it difficult to clean it all up yourself?"

"No... Actually, there are many rooms that I haven't tended to as of yet."

Though with the mess they were in, they couldn't really be called rooms.

Zagan was always willing to lend a hand when it came to carrying heavy objects, but fundamentally, castle maintenance was under Nephy's jurisdiction. She even managed all the meals, so she had quite a bit of daily work.

If I could just prepare something like a familiar... It wasn't like the choice of hiring someone was out of the question, but Zagan wanted to enjoy living together with just the two of them. And unfortunately, sorcery which enslaved something like a familiar was outside of his realm of expertise.

Zagan headed toward his seat while racking his brains for a solution.

There were already two portions of food lined up atop the table. And next to the table was a cart with a pot on top of it.

Reflexively, Zagan let out a deep sigh of admiration.

So she's learned even more recipes, huh? There were several dishes here that he was seeing for the first time.

As Zagan sat at the table, Nephy began to quietly describe the food.

"For the bread, I have prepared dinner rolls from rye wheat. The appetizer is a salad with tomatoes and green vegetables seasoned with Caesar dressing and grated cheese."

Tomatoes were Nephy's favorite food. She was likely confident in her work, since her somehow triumphant ears were quivering.

Incidentally, Caesar was the name of a sorcerer from ancient times. He was an odd man who was singularly fixated on his palate instead of immortality, so most believed the fundamentals of cooking was something he built up.

Next, Nephy poured soup into an empty dish while continuing her explanation.

"The soup is an oatmeal consomme. For the main dish, I have prepared a lamb saute, so please enjoy them together," Nephy said as she lined up the dish filled with soup in front of Zagan.

A fragrant aroma tickled his nose. And then, she placed the main meat dish in front of him as well.

Normally, this would have been everything, but Nephy then took out a bowl with ice in it.

“And finally, I have prepared pudding for dessert.”

“What’s pudding?” It was the first time Zagan heard that word.

“Manuela taught me how to make it. It’s a confection made by steaming eggs and fresh cream... Um, it’s very sweet, and tasty to boot,” Nephy said as her cheeks turned slightly red.

Seeing that delighted expression of hers, even Zagan began to blush.

“I-I see... Still, you got it from that clerk, huh? Did she end up telling you to do anything strange?”

As Nephy nodded calmly, she put her hand to her chest and replied to his questions.

“It’s alright. All she did was make me wear some slightly embarrassing clothes.”

“That’s not alright!”

“Huh...? I only showed it to Manuela, so it’s alright?”

“That’s not the problem, though...”

The girl had yet to learn to suspect others of anything.

Well, it should be fine as long as it’s that woman.

Back when Nephy was caught in a trap, Manuela didn’t pay any heed to the danger and followed him all the way to an enemy sorcerer’s base. The chance that she would bring harm to Nephy was practically nil. Besides, meddling in Nephy’s personal relationships would have felt plain awkward.

He was unable to wipe away his anxiety, so Zagan urged Nephy to take her seat as well.

“Well, shall we eat?”

As Nephy nodded with a bob, she took a seat next to Zagan.

She was wearing clothes like those a servant would wear, but Zagan didn’t think of her as any sort of servant or slave. He made sure that they always enjoyed their meals together.

As he ate some of the freshly baked bread, the savory scent of rye was accompanied by the oily butter as it spread throughout his entire mouth. Even after he swallowed it, he could still feel that sensation in his saliva.

“Haaa... A home-cooked meal is something this delicious, huh?”

“Master Zagan, you always say the same thing, don’t you?”

She may have been looking at him from the side, expressionless as usual, but Zagan didn’t overlook the fact that Nephy’s tender lips had loosened.

One month had passed since Zagan purchased Nephy, but whenever the two of them had a meal, they would still have such an exchange.

Anyway, while having a taste of the soup, he listened to Nephy.

“Master Zagan, what have you been investigating lately?”

“Hm...? Let’s see, the other day, we encountered something called a ‘demon’ during the case with Barbatos, right? I’m looking into that thing.”

“Is it something difficult?”

“Definitely. Even with Marchosias’ legacy, I haven’t been able to locate any information that gets to the heart of the matter. I doubt an Archdemon who lived for a thousand years never looked into them, though.”

Or perhaps, precisely because he drew near to the core of the matter, he may have hidden it.

It may be a good idea to re-examine Marchosias’ castle, then.

Along with the Sigil of the Archdemon, Zagan inherited Marchosias’ legacy. That didn’t include just his assets, but also his castle and research material.

However, Zagan knew he would have to dig deep to find any real secrets within them.

As he pondered such thoughts, Zagan dropped his gaze down to his right hand. *I feel like... I’ve seen a similar crest somewhere, though...* Relatively recent, too. While racking his brains, Zagan tilted his head to the side.

“How rare of you to ask such a thing, Nephy. Are you interested?”

“No, it’s just that you’ve been making a tired face lately, so it’s been on my mind...”

Zagan felt up his own face. He’d tried to appear the same as always, but it seemed he’d failed. *Wait, is that why she tried to surprise me earlier?*

It seemed like Nephy was trying to cheer Zagan up in her own way.

That simple act of kindness made Zagan’s heart burn, but he let out a snort with a ‘hmpf.’

“He *was* still the previous Archdemon. It would be boring if everything just fell straight into my lap right away. Seeing how far I can keep going through it is the fun part.”

“Yes.”

He was putting up a meaningless show of courage in an overly strong tone, but Nephy simply replied as if she understood all of that full well.

Why is it that at these times, I can’t say ‘thank you’...? And while he was thinking such thoughts, his last plate had become empty, and Nephy lined up the dessert in front of him.

“Please, go ahead.”

“Mmm...”

The pudding that Nephy brought out had something of a gelatinous nature which jiggled about. And there was a pitch black

caramel sauce poured over it.

What kind of food is this...? Zagan had only eaten dried meat and milk, which only vaguely resembled meals, up until he met Nephy, so pudding was a completely unidentifiable object to him.

From the texture, it resembled a boiled egg, but its entire body would playfully jiggle about from a simple shake of the table. It also seemed unsteady to the point where he thought poking it with a spoon would make the whole thing crumble. She said it was steamed, but Zagan was unable to distinguish whether it was actually steamed food or raw.

While completely at a loss as to how he should handle it, Nephy pointed out to a small spoon.

“Please enjoy it by using that spoon over there.”

“...Got it.” Ready himself, Zagan tried scooping at the cusp of the pudding with the spoon.

With practically no resistance at all, a light brown bit was now set on his spoon. He felt like it would just topple if he handled it roughly, so he carefully and steadily brought it over to his mouth. And then—

“Oh, it’s sweet.”

“Yes!” Nephy nodded as if she was relieved.

The world is vast. Such a sweet and delightful taste has really existed all this time?

The corner of his eyes grew hot. Zagan jerked his gaze upward as tears began welling up in his eyes.

At the same time, he thought of one more thing that he had to learn. And, at that exact moment... the barrier protecting the castle shattered.



“...Hm? It seems we have a guest,” Zagan nonchalantly muttered.

Zagan had put up a barrier around his entire domain, and his castle was at the heart of it. Forget getting close, a normal person couldn’t even perceive the existence of the castle itself. And even when one broke through it, they had to face numerous traps that Zagan had conjured, yet the intruder had even broken through those and advanced onward.

That’s... pretty impressive...

Zagan couldn’t tell how much of that Nephy understood as she tilted her head to the side like a small songbird.

“Shall we go out to meet them?”

“...No, it’s fine. We’re in the middle of a meal, so they can wait. Leave them be.”

He was able to return such a leisurely reply because this was not a first for him. Also, this was the other problem that Zagan had to put in

order right away.

Since I'm an Archdemon, 'guests' come to visit pretty much every day.

Zagan was eighteen, but that was the mark of a mere novice to sorcerers who'd lived for several hundred years. And yet, he'd been crowned Archdemon, so people after his life were a dime a dozen. It wasn't like he faced multiple opponents a day, but at least one seemed to appear every two days or so.

The intruders were mainly sorcerers and Angelic Knights who misunderstood the extent of their own powers.

...Incidentally, the number one intruders who came by since his coronation were those three Angelic Knights from the church who misunderstood not only the power they possessed but also the identity of their enemy.

Before, he wouldn't pay any heed to the mere sparks falling down on him. However, his life had changed.

Right now he had Nephy. She was the first girl Zagan had ever yearned for, and the one who had taught him the true meaning of happiness.

Even the sparks from that rabble could burn Nephy, so he had to contain them.

Those damn idiots must be eradicated... This was also the very first step to letting Nephy live under the light of the sun.

If Zagan could demonstrate how it wasn't worth it to challenge him, then the fools who would dare lay their hand on Nephy would also eventually vanish. For that purpose, he had to take those who challenged him while making incorrect assumptions, and make them suffer slowly but steadily until fear and despair were etched into their very being before sending them away.

A corpse was unable to spread the word of fear, after all. That was what he had to do, but Zagan simply sat next to Nephy and savored the pudding.

The traps will make them suffer without Nephy having to see anything.

Zagan preferred not to behave cruelly in front of Nephy. This compassionate girl would grieve even for the deaths of such rabble, and he knew it could potentially scar her too.

I feel like I wouldn't be able to recover if she hated me after seeing me commit horrific acts.

That was why Zagan didn't leave his seat, choosing to enjoy his lunch with her instead.

But... this time they might reach us... The current intruder tore down his barrier completely. Given the situation, it was possible they would march through the rest of his defenses and reach his castle.

As he thought of his next move, Zagan moved his spoon carefully as if protecting the pudding that he had only taken a single bite of so

far. Such a fine dish wasn't one he could disrespect by gobbling it up in a hurry. The intruder was approaching, but Zagan wholeheartedly savored the pudding one bite after the other.

"Mm. I see... It's delicious."

"I am honored. But... is this really alright? Um, about the guest, I mean..." Likely worried about the intruder, Nephy was speaking while fidgeting about.

"At any rate, it's the same as always. It's their fault for coming while we're in the middle of eating. Forget them."

"Haaa..." Nephy didn't speak any more about it, and let out a long sigh instead.

After that, she tore off a piece of bread and began chewing on it. She was a slow eater, though that may have been because of her small mouth. Even as Zagan gazed at her and wished she would eat faster due to the oncoming danger, he secretly enjoyed watching her.

And then, just about when they were halfway through eating... the gate to the castle was smashed down along with an explosive roar.

"...What an impatient guest."

It seemed they had gotten through all of the traps and barriers Zagan had setup. The intruder appeared to have grasped Zagan and Nephy's position by their presence, and was heading straight toward the dining hall.

"Haaa..." He could easily fix the door with sorcery even if it was broken, but he was unable to prevent dust from getting on their meal.

As Zagan waved his finger through the air, the door to the dining hall opened by itself. And then, a member of the mystic races wearing a mask appeared before them.

The mask had the shape of something like a snake, and gave off the impression of a native costume from somewhere. A jet black robe covered their entire body, and a hood was worn right down to their eyes, so it wasn't clear what race they actually were. From the hems of the robe, he could catch a glimpse of arms and legs covered in boorish armor.

The intruder didn't seem to think that they would be greeted, and was simply standing there as if faltering.

Sure is tall, huh?

Zagan's height was average for an adult male, but the mysterious intruder was about a head taller than that.

Eventually, the intruder muttered as if they'd gathered their resolve.

"So you're... Archdemon Zagan?" The intruder asked that question in a voice that was rather hard to hear.

"You should first name yourself before asking for the name of another... However, I happen to remember seeing your figure before.

You're called 'Apparition Valefor' or something, was it?"

Such a bizarre figure wasn't one he would simply forget. And if he remembered right, it was one of the sorcerers in attendance at the dark auction where he met Nephy. His undesirable friend Barbatos had told him that this was one of the Archdemon candidates at the time.

Back then, he arbitrarily ignored them, but it seemed that was impossible now.

After a while, Valefor stuck out their armored finger.

"Archdemon Zagan, I will defeat you, and then... I will take your damn power as my own." Such honest and clumsy words didn't suit a sorcerer.

However, Zagan didn't even look over to Valefor, and simply spoke as if to engrave fear in them.

"We're in the middle of eating right now. Wait there a while."

"Ugh..." Valefor shrank back as Zagan gave his order with such extraordinary vigor.

As they obeyed, Zagan gripped the small spoon in his hand and scooped up some pudding.

I want to savor the pudding that Nephy made for me, down to the very last bite.

It may have sounded like Zagan was making fun of them, but he was dead serious. Plus, there was also the fact that Zagan was irritated by having his meal interrupted. And due to that single phrase, which seemed filled to the brim with the dignity of an Archdemon, Valefor fell to their knees as if unable to endure it anymore.

Nephy then whispered to Zagan in a somewhat tense state.

"Master Zagan, if it pleases you, then I can make it again."

"I'd like that, but setting down my spoon here is a different matter entirely." And with that reply, the sound of Valefor gritting their teeth rang out.

"Don't... make fun... of me...!" The intruder raised their arm as they yelled, and the light of sorcery came pouring out.



Valefor understood that Zagan was an Archdemon and still came to challenge him. Therefore, the sorcery they unleashed was likely the best they had. And yet, absolutely nothing happened.

“Uh...”

From the other side of the mask, Zagan could sense a suddenly shaken presence.

“If you’re going to invade the domain of another sorcerer, then you should at least investigate your opponent. My second name is Sorcerer Slayer, got it? Sorcery doesn’t work on me.”

Zagan ‘ate’ the sorcery of others. If it was within his own domain, then no matter where it was, he was able to suppress sorcery. No matter how outstanding a sorcerer this mysterious intruder was, as long as they were a sorcerer, they had no chance of victory.

While scooping at the pudding with his spoon, Zagan let out a sigh and informing them of the facts. He wanted to savor the pudding until the end. And thus, he hoped they would just understand the gap in power between them and just leave.

If a sorcerer with a second name were to leave without being able to do anything, that in itself would make my power known.

For the time being, it wasn’t like he’d lost sight of his goal of finishing the pudding, either.

However, Valefor raised their voice in praise.

“I see. Even though you’re rotten, you’re still an Archdemon, huh!?” The mysterious intruder’s arms transformed as they yelled that line. The steel armor turned into hardened scales, and the tips of their fingers turned into stake-like nails.

Zagan could sense enough power from those thick arms and claws to pulverize stone without relying on sorcery.

This... isn’t sorcery, right...? The flow of power corresponding to a magic circle didn’t occur. And it wasn’t like it had been replaced with a spell or a charm, either, since there was no change to the flow of mana itself.

In this world, there existed many races who possessed wisdom aside from humans. Like therianthropes who possessed claws and fangs, or the avian who possessed wings.

Because the claws and fangs of such races were not sorcery, they couldn’t be stopped by an arrangement that sealed sorcery. That would mean the transformation of Valefor’s arms also fell under that category. And among the mystic races, he recognized it as the arm of a dragon.

Dragons were, much like the elves, legendary beings spoken of in legends. They were a race who refused contact with the world, and furthermore, possessed wisdom and sorcery beyond the realm of

humans. They were even said to pride themselves on mana that surpassed the elves. As they grew older, they were an existence who could take on the name of gods and devils and line themselves up next to them.

However, despite being a dragon, this one's quite powerless, huh? Is this something like a sorcerer who gained the power of a dragon? At any rate, it seemed they possessed power disconnected from the structure of sorcery, which was likely why the mysterious intruder challenged an Archdemon in the first place.

Valefor leaped into the dining hall, then came swooping down with the claws of a dragon.

"I told you we're in the middle of eating. I'll serve as your opponent later, so can you not wait a little?"

However, the claws were stopped by a single hand. The spoon that he was previously gripping was now held in his mouth, and his left hand was protecting the pudding as if it were precious.

Zagan could tell that Valefor was opening their eyes wide within that mask at the absurd turn of events. But still, the intruder didn't let up.

"Ridiculing... me!" The mouth of the mask opened with a snap, and the light of mana began converging in the area.

There was a well known legend that dragons burned mana within their bodies to fire a breath of light.

It seemed Valefor was trying to perform such a feat, and Zagan possessed no technique to seal it away.

As his face stiffened up in realization, Zagan roared.

You damn fool... I warned you!

"You'll get dust on the food like this, so just cut it out already!"

It felt like he had mixed up his public stance and his brutally honest feelings, but Zagan let go of the claws and slammed his palm against the mask to forcefully shut its mouth.

The mana from the breath dispersed. Zagan's palm was forced back, but the shock occurred right below the brain and shook it, so the intruder's large body was blown into the air.

Nephy covered her face with a start, and when she opened her eyes timidly, she saw the intruder collapse to the ground with a heavy thud.

The transfigured dragon arms and legs returned to their armor form, and a fissure ran down the mask with a crick and a crack.

It seemed they'd lost consciousness.

Making sure that the hindrance had been silenced, Zagan let out a snort with a 'hmph.'

I've also mellowed out, huh?

If it was the old him, the intruder would've been turned into

mincemeat already. But now he was holding back and stopping at only knocking them out, which would have been unthinkable a mere month ago.

The change in him was all because of the joy of living with Nephly. And as if biting down on just how miraculous his happiness was, Zagan muttered.

"It may be better... to strengthen the barrier a little more. From now on, intruders like this will likely only multiply."

He had defeated them with ease, but Valefor was by no means a weak sorcerer. Zagan knew he likely wouldn't have had a guaranteed victory if he fought them a month prior.

The reason he was able to win so easily now was simple, really. Zagan had gotten much stronger. In addition to the Sigil of the Archdemon, he'd gotten Marchosias' legacy. In general, sorcery grew stronger in proportion to accumulated knowledge. As such, after becoming an Archdemon, Zagan rapidly built up his power.

Nephly left her seat, somewhat pale, as Zagan let out a sigh. Leaving her meal as it was, she rushed over to the intruder.

"Hear me, Nephly, just leave them be. They likely won't awaken until our meal is done."

"No, this child... just may be..." As Nephly said that and lifted up the intruder in her arms, its limbs fell off with a clang.

"Huh?" The sight made even Zagan lose color in his face.

Wait, what? No, all I did was hit them, right? I didn't tear off their arms and legs, did I? Even though he swore not to massacre anyone in front of Nephly, it seemed he'd broke his vow already.

And while Zagan was all shook up, Nephly muttered "Like I thought..." and removed the cracked mask.

"Master Zagan, she's still a child."

A small child's face was under the mask. Moreover, it was a girl.

She had pale green hair like the sprouts of spring. Since her eyes were closed, he couldn't see their color, but he did notice that she had long eyelashes. Her lips were a lively pink, and perhaps because she was wrapped up in a bulky robe, her cheeks were flushed.

The armored arms and legs were just for show, a sort of papier mache, so to speak. It seemed the hollow armor was being manipulated by sorcery of some kind.

And then, Zagan finally understood *exactly* what he had done.

Could it be... I just slugged a kid and knocked her out? Why did a child possess the power of a dragon while pretending to be a sorcerer? In the first place, was this really Apparition Valefor? A flood of such questions welled up within Zagan.

It seemed this wasn't the time for Zagan to be pleased with the fact that he hadn't killed her. As if hiding his loss of composure, Zagan

opened his mouth to speak.

“Hmph... D-D-Do not panic, Nephy. If you are worried, then it is fine to give her aid. Well, let’s see, I believe there should be some cold medicine left around. Also, she’s not dead, correct? She’s alive, yes? For the time being, shall we carry her to a room with a bed?”

“Please calm down, Master Zagan. Cold medicine cannot be used to treat the wounded.” Nephy spoke out as if admonishing Zagan, who had not managed to hide a single particle of his unrest. Then, she put her hand to the child’s brow before nodding.

“It’s alright. It seems she’s only lost consciousness. She appears uninjured, as well.”

“I-Is that really true? You’re telling the truth, right? She’s not dead, right?”

“Yes.”

After hearing that, Zagan let out a sigh of relief with a hand against his chest. Nephy looked up at him as he did that, as if his actions were unexpected.

“Wh-What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing, Master Zagan... You’re as kind as I thought.”

“Huh...?”

As Zagan stared back at her in wonder, Nephy held Valefor in her arms. Though she was just a small girl, it seemed difficult for Nephy to lift her with her slender arms.

And so, despite still being bewildered, Zagan gestured to let him carry the child instead.

“Is this fine?”

“Yes.”

“Seriously, what a troublesome intruder.” Even while grumbling out a complaint, Zagan was terrified by the thought that he’d slugged a child in front of Nephy. However, as if to banish such fears, Nephy nestled up against his side.

The little dragon’s intrusion marked the first change of many in the daily life they shared.

Chapter II: A Dragon I Picked up Got Overly Attached to Me, so I Made Her My Daughter

“Chastille Lillqvist — thine authority as an Archangel is hereby indefinitely suspended.”

Upon hearing that from her direct superior, Cardinal Clavwell, Chastille hung her head down in silence. And her Sacred Sword was nowhere to be found. As it was an all important symbol of the church, it was now enshrined within the church’s treasury.

The origin of this matter was what happened half a month ago. The seat of the thirteenth Archdemon that had opened up was given to a young sorcerer named Zagan. And naturally, the church wanted to strike down said Zagan while he was still inexperienced, and began gathering their forces.

However, the one who opposed the idea was Chastille.

“I’ve had my life saved by him twice. I cannot turn my back on him now.”

Surely, there was a more clever way for her to prove her point. However, even with the enormous power of a demon right before his eyes, Zagan didn’t falter. Seeing him like that, Chastille felt ashamed of herself.

That’s why I don’t want to fight against him, even if that means betraying my oaths.

As a wielder of a Sacred Sword who served as the church’s greatest weapon, and not only that, as the only woman in the group, Chastille had heavy support from the populace, and yet she chose to do something that could’ve easily been considered heresy.

They no longer had the time to worry about Zagan’s subjugation, as Cardinal Clavwell had to pass down her sentence instead. This was, in other words, proof that there was no point to their actions beyond ostentatiously displaying the authority of the church.

By merely making sorcerers out as evil, they were able to justify themselves. That was why any old turncoat was viewed as a bigger problem than a mighty sorcerer.

The corruption of the church... may just have gone as far as it can. As Chastille stifled a sigh, the Angelic Knights behind her raised their voices.

“Please wait, Your Eminence Clavwell! That decision is far too excessive.”

“I am in agreement! If you take Lady Chastille’s achievements into consideration, there should be some manner of leniency.”

“Moreover, now that a new Archdemon has appeared, decreasing the number of Sacred Swords out on the field will only invite chaos!”

“Cease that, all of you!” Chastille roughened her voice in response to the Angelic Knights’ backlash.

Gazing at the ones who quieted down without hesitation, the old cardinal let out a grave sigh.

“Does it appear to all of you that I feel no remorse?” Cardinal Clavwell, who seemed to have aged even more, muttered as if lamenting.

“That’s...” Thus, the Angelic Knights had no choice but to keep quiet in response.

All I wanted... was to protect the people who were crying out for help... That was why I became an Angelic Knight... After she was granted a Sacred Sword, she held pride in her work as she protected the innocent masses from the unreasonable oppression of sorcerers. And before she knew it, she got nothing but orders titled ‘must be eliminated’ from the church, and she was no longer even able to swing her sword by her own will.

A single phrase from her, that a sorcerer wasn’t evil, had caused this massive uproar precisely because of how loyal she’d been so far.

But, with this, I guess I at least managed to pay back my debt to Zagan. At the very least, the formation of the subjugation squad would be greatly delayed. There was no way that shrewd sorcerer wouldn’t take countermeasures against the church, and she should have at least been able to help them by buying some time.

Suddenly, Chastille recalled the elven girl that was by Zagan’s side. Even though she was a sorcerer’s maid, she acted as if Chastille was a friend. And Chastille felt that they truly could have been friends, if only she wasn’t an Angelic Knight.

Though it was far too late, such fanciful thought ran through her mind.

Eventually, Cardinal Clavwell placed his hand upon Chastille’s shoulder.

“Chastille, please do not make such a resigned face. With the passage of time, I believe I will be able to have thine punishment retracted.”

Chastille suddenly stared at him in wonder as she heard those hope-filled words.

“What... do you...?”

Cardinal Clavwell was gazing at Chastille as if he was watching

over a beloved daughter.

“A Sacred Sword chooses its wielder by its own will. Someone chosen by a Sacred Sword shall not languish in squalor forever. Please endure it for now. These old bones shall definitely rectify the situation.”

“...Your words are far more than I deserve,” Chastille quietly replied.

The church is twisted, but there may still be hope of salvation.

At the very least, wasn't there one person who acknowledged her?

The corners of her eyes turned hot, but Cardinal Clavwell's expression remained stern.

“However, do keep in mind, Chastille. I can only protect thee... atop the political stage.”

“...Th-That is to say?”

Cardinal Clavwell released a grave sigh, then told her what he meant in an almost fearful tone.

“The most dreadful member of the Archangels, Raphael Hyurandell, is headed this way.”

The mere mention of that name made Chastille gulp and shudder.

He was a great man who continued to develop his legend well into his fifties. Even more than his skills with a sword, his cruel nature led to the two words ‘most dreadful’ being attached to him.

Cardinal Clavwell quietly informed her of his imminent arrival.

“Most criticism of Archangels never becomes a matter of public knowledge. However, I have heard many bad rumors about him.”

The man who was feared to the point of being called ‘most dreadful’ was traveling toward the apostate Chastille.

Purge... A single blood soaked word came to mind, but what Cardinal Clavwell had to say differed from that.

“It is said that he is trying to create a new force within the church by gathering like-minded individuals.”

Hearing those words made Chastille open her eyes wide. She didn't know how many had joined him so far, but it was the church which declared sorcerers as evil. Among the Angelic Knights and priests, there were likely many who sympathized with his ideas.

The most dreadful Archangel would take hold of even more authority... And considering the timing of everything...

It may become a beacon. The betrayal of the Maiden of the Sacred Sword could not go public. After all, if another Archangel cut her down, those rumors would become a severe earthquake and shake the world. The church would sway greatly.

Still, I followed my heart for once. Her future may have darkened and closed off, but she felt no sense of regret.



“Where... Am I...?”

The young girl, Valefor, muttered those words as she opened her eyes in a daze.

This was a room in Zagan’s castle. Up until just recently, it had things like specimens of strange creatures and test tubes that were used in experiments to create them scattered about everywhere, but right now it contained only simple furniture and a bed. It seemed to function as a guest room.

Zagan’s visitors were mostly assassins aiming for his knowledge and status or other such lowlifes, so he thought there was no purpose in preparing a guest room, but Nephy said ‘Does Lord Barbatos not come over?’ as she cleanly put it all in order.

Zagan intended to never let that villain use the room that Nephy had prettied up, but even so, there was always the chance that others would drop by.

I mean, Nephy’s friends could always show up. There was the clerk from the clothing shop in Kianoides whose name had just come up during lunch, as well as the Angelic Knight Chastille, for example. There was no way Zagan would just flatly turn them away if they showed up on his doorstep.

Inside that guest room, Zagan and Nephy were lined up next to each other watching over Valefor’s condition.

The little girl’s gaze wandered about the tidy room. She was clearly confused.

And looking at that, Zagan felt relieved. *Ah, thank goodness. She’s alive.*

Sure, Nephy had confirmed that she was alive, and Valefor was also breathing while she was asleep, but he was worried whether she would wake up.

Zagan had tried to not rob his opponent of life. It was for Nephy’s sake, but there was also the problem of cleaning up any corpses that were in his domain. That was why he had mostly just lightly poked them before throwing them out, but having said that, he never really confirmed whether they survived.

It wasn’t like he had lacked confidence in his control or anything!

This young girl named Valefor was lying down in bed without her armor or robe. All she was wearing underneath the papier mache armor was an old shirt. She didn’t even have any trousers on.

Since she was a child, she was likely just wearing the bear minimum she needed to inside the armor.

Her green hair was tied up in thick braids, and two horns were sticking out to the rear from the openings in her hair. Her eyes, which

were finally exposed, were golden, and her height was only around the level of Zagan's waist at most.

Judging from her appearance, other than the horns on her head, she was a human child.



“...Y-You bastard!” She had likely finally come to her senses. Valefor’s golden eyes snapped open, and she sprang into the air to strike Zagan.

“...Hmm? Well, if you’re this energetic, then you must be just fine, I guess.” And yet, Zagan stopped that fist with leisurely movements.

Although one might call it a fist, it was soft, and even if he was struck by it, it would have, at most, had the charming destructive power of a bop.

However, Zagan could sense power in that arm that would probably have reduced an average sorcerer into minced meat.

Well, she is a sorcerer after all.

Those who aimed to be sorcerers began by enhancing their own body. They would lengthen their lifespans, gain enough power to smash even a rock, and obtain a body that could prevent disease and the need for sleep. By doing so, one could eliminate all obstructions to their research.

That was why regular people had no chance of defeating a sorcerer. Even if they could manipulate fire and lightning, their pure physical strength and speed were in another league. If Zagan didn’t catch her fist, the room would likely have been in terrible shape.

However, it was a somehow difficult atmosphere. This girl, Valefor, was a sorcerer of the same caliber as Barbatos and Zagan before he succeeded Archdemon Marchosias. She was on a different level from the run-of-the-mill sorcerer or bandit. An enemy deserving of caution, basically.

But she’s just a brat...

She was short, and her cheeks looked to be both soft and squishy. A genuine and authentic child, it seemed.

Zagan didn’t really know if he should try to overpower her or be kind to her.

In any case, she was difficult to handle. Even as he stopped her fist, Valefor raised a menacing voice with a ‘Grrrr’ and left Zagan scratching at his cheek.

“Hmph. Show some gratitude to Nephy. I show no mercy, even if my opponent is a brat, so if Nephy didn’t plead for your life, your head would be severed and I’d have thrown you out by now.”

From those words alone, Valefor finally seemed to understand that she was ‘allowed to live.’ And that if Zagan felt like it, even at that very instant, he could finish her off.

I can’t do something so cruel in front of Nephy, though!

And finally, the fist that she had thrust out began losing its strength.

“...Why?” It was a childish lisping voice that matched her

appearance. The muffled voice she had before was likely some power from the mask, something that was fabricated.

And in response to Valefor's question, Zagan tilted his head to the side.

"Why... what?"

"I came here... looking to take your damn life. Why have you not... killed me for opposing you?"

Zagan then knit his brows like he had absolutely no interest in that at all.

"I told you already, didn't I? Nephy saved you. That's why I let you live. That's all, really."

It was plain as day that the child dying by Zagan's hands would wrench Nephy's heart, even if he was just defending himself. It was truly good that the child realized that before he had to kill her.

Still, I can't sense any hostility or hatred... Since she was the vanquished, it seemed normal for feelings of resentment and humiliation to grow.

It may have been that she simply lost her will to fight, but no one would think that she was a sorcerer who was aiming for Zagan's life mere minutes ago.

On the contrary, Valefor was making a more bewildered face than Zagan himself.

And while the two of them stood there, confused by one another, Zagan threw out his doubts toward her.

"So, what were you planning by attacking me?"

"..."

She declared that she would take the power of an Archdemon, but most sorcerers weren't all that insistent on power. No, it may have been better to say that an average sorcerer's definition of power was different.

What sorcerers sought was the accumulation of knowledge and techniques. Most didn't show an interest in the power to combat others.

That was because just by acquiring knowledge, sorcerers acquired power. Power was something that came on its own through the process of gaining knowledge. The power to fight was a viable means to make others obey, but it wasn't very helpful for the pursuit of knowledge.

Acquiring knowledge had the same meaning as acquiring power, but the opposite didn't hold true.

And yet, what Valefor coveted was the 'power to fight.'

The power of an Archdemon was a vast amount of mana granted by the Sigil of the Archdemon, not knowledge. There were also those like Barbatos who were aiming for the status and assets of an

Archdemon, but it was baffling for a sorcerer to covet the power.

And, as Zagan glared at her, Valefor's body stiffened up as if she was frightened.

Looking at her like this, she really is just a child, huh?

No matter how he looked at her, she didn't look like a sorcerer who could even fire off a dragon's breath.

And while Nephy was giving her a once-over, Valefor opened her mouth as if letting out a groan.

"I wanted... power."

"I see. I don't think that's something most sorcerers would really desire, though?"

Sorcerers grew strong simply so they could protect themselves. With their elongated lifespans, they required the power to protect their own body and assets.

It was neither a means nor an end. It was not something that one would covet to the point of risking their life.

Well, obviously there are exceptions in the world, though.

As Zagan pointed that out, Valefor muttered something, as if she was biting down on her disgrace.

"Because... I'm weak. That's why... I need... power."

"I see. So you need power so that you can live, then?"

It seemed to contradict the general notion of sorcerers, but Zagan was convinced by that answer. In the first place, Zagan was set on polishing his own power in order to attain immortality.

In other words, a so called 'exception who focused on power more than knowledge' referred to Zagan himself.

That is to say, there wasn't really a need for her enemy to be Zagan or Nephy, so that was likely the reason why she didn't bear any hostility or hatred.

"Then, why did you target me of all people? I *am* an Archdemon, didn't you think you were ill-prepared to challenge me?"

"Zagan, you're a brand new Archdemon. And if the second name 'Sorcerer Slayer' held true, then you should have been weak against someone who wasn't a sorcerer."

"That was why you thought that even you could defeat me?"

As Zagan replied in an overbearing manner, Valefor nodded. Then, her hands were trembling lightly.

Somehow, it feels like I'm bullying the weak or something here.

It didn't really feel good at all. Zagan was the one whose life was being targeted, but he felt like he was the one doing something bad. He didn't really know how to describe such a situation. In any case, it threw him off beat.

"Well, you had a decent idea, but you're far too powerless to kill me."

“...” Valefor did not reply, but she was biting down on her lip.

And, as Zagan leaned back while joining his hands together behind his head, he then asked her about what weighed on his mind the most.

“By the way, you’re a dragon, right?”

With a start, Valefor’s body shook.

“...That’s right.”

“To think there was still a living specimen out there, huh? Don’t you lot get far stronger than humans with the simple passage of time? Why do you covet power so much?”

Just by living, dragons would grow to heights beyond the understanding of human intellect. There wasn’t even a need for them to accumulate knowledge like sorcerers. According to the legends, it was written that a dragon who lived for ten thousand years even killed and ate a god.

And so, going out of the way to take on a fight with a faint hope for victory sounded more like something a human would do.

Rather than that, is she in a hurry? By some chance, she may have had a reason that she needed to become stronger right this instant.

After hearing Zagan speak, Valefor hung her head down and even had tears welling up in her eyes.

“I mean...”

It seemed she didn’t want anyone to hear of it. Her frail figure as she cast down her gaze didn’t look anything like a sorcerer, let alone a dragon.

“Ah, I see!” And looking at that figure, Zagan finally realized the source of his unease.

This girl... is that. She’s the same as me when I was caught trying to steal food! It wasn’t anything outrageous like having him as an enemy or her bearing a grudge or anything.

It was like she was simply hungry and because there was no other way, she tried to steal food but failed, or she tried to nick some valuables but her target ended up being a brigand. In any case, she was the same as a child who had fallen into a situation where they were paying for their own mistake.

Zagan had memories of going through the same thing countless times himself, so he understood her to the point where it hurt.

And, as he came to an understanding all on his own, Nephry tilted her head to the side.

“Master Zagan, is something the matter?”

“No, just talking to myself.”

Ah, I see, I get it. It’s like she found an easy mark, so she tried to meddle with them but was mercilessly walloped and ended up on the verge of tears. Makes sense.

If he replaced the phrase 'I want power' with 'I want food,' then he understood her full well.

After all, when one was hungry, they weren't in the mood to get angry.

Of course, what this little girl had done was bad, but rather than shouting out 'What will you do about this!?' it was likely better to scold her for doing something bad.

Since Zagan treated it like he was speaking to another sorcerer or an enemy, he was on edge. When, as a matter of fact, his assumption was incorrect.

Then, it's already obvious how she should be handled here. And while thinking how absurd it was for him to put on a grand front as he did, Zagan let out a snort with a 'hmph.'

"Well, whatever. More importantly, you have challenged me, an Archdemon. You ought to be punished for that."

"Master Zagan, um..." As Nephy raised her voice like she wanted to petition him for something, Zagan simply returned a nod as if he already understood.

And just what kind of dreadful treatment did she end up imagining? Valefor suddenly began trembling with tears in her eyes at the thought.

And so, as if passing down judgment on that little girl, Zagan declared the following.

"For one week starting now, I order you to assist Nephy!"

"...Eh?" Both Nephy and Valefor let out astonished voices in response to his words.

"We're short on hands for cleaning, right?"

"Eh, ah, well, yes..." As Nephy bobbed her head up and down, Zagan reclined back and nodded in return.

"Well then, you can use this girl however you see fit."

If Valefor didn't bear enmity for Zagan or anything, then it wasn't like she was fixated on the seat of an Archdemon. In that case, there was no reason to go as far as killing her.

If it was punishment for a child, then something like this was acceptable.

And while she's helping out, it's probably fine if she's taught what is okay for her to do and what isn't.

Zagan wasn't someone who had any right to preach about the concept of good and evil, but he would at least be able to teach her about the common sense and rules from the perspective of a villain. Since his opponent was a child, Zagan thought it was about time he put his foot down as an adult.

If she were to repeat the same things after that, then it had nothing to do with Zagan anymore. If she were able to better

understand how to conduct herself, then that in itself would be fine.

And, as Zagan said that, Valefor made a face like she couldn't believe him and spoke up.

"You're not... going to... eat me?"

Hearing such unexpected words left Zagan feeling dizzy.

"...Wait right there. Why would I even eat someone like you?"

Zagan was aware that his face looked evil, but there was no way he would just agree with being talked about as someone who would eat children whole.

Valefor then opened her mouth like it was difficult for her to put her thoughts into words.

"If humans... obtain fresh dragon blood... they become stronger..."

"Ah, now that you mention it, I *have* heard that before."

If one showers themselves in the blood of dragons, then they become immortal, or if one eats dragon meat, then they obtain unlimited mana, or if one eats boiled dragon bone, then any disease could be cured. Since time immemorial, there had been an uncountable number of similar legends.

In truth, when Valefor transformed her arms and legs into that of a dragon, Zagan thought of the possibility that she was a sorcerer who resorted to such a method.

So that's why she's so scared, huh?

If a human were to capture her, then even if they were able to communicate, she wouldn't feel like she was alive.

The reason such a young girl was using that papier mache armor and mask to create such a figure was likely because of that fact. It was the same as Nephy being targeted because she was an elf.

Even though she was a dragon, Valefor was likely still a very young specimen. She was categorized as a juvenile dragon. She wasn't someone who could stand up to an Angelic Knight or a sorcerer who possessed significant power. That was why there was a need to hide her true identity. The reason she even used the sorcery of humans was also so she could protect herself.

Thinking of it like that, it was only obvious for this young girl to be insistent on obtaining the power to fight.

After mulling over all that, Zagan let out a snort with a 'hmpf.'

"Don't make light of me. Be it a dragon or a human, all I would get from eating a brat like you is a bad aftertaste." As he informed her of his thoughts, tears welled up in Valefor's eyes once more.

This is why I hate dealing with kids... Zagan then recalled that even back when he was sifting through trash and doing highway robbery, there were older children who looked out after him.

If it were them, just what would they do at such times?

Letting out a small sigh, Zagan opened his mouth to speak.

“Nephy, are there leftovers remaining from lunch?”

“Yes. There is still some bread and soup,” Nephy replied, her ears quivering as if she was wondering why he was asking such a thing.

And then, Zagan curtly informed her of his plans.

“...Bring it over for her.”

After blinking once in surprise, Nephy beamed a smile at Zagan.

“Yes! I’ll bring it over after warming it up,” Nephy said, then quickly left the room with a pitter-patter of footsteps.

All that was left behind was Zagan, who was making a somewhat sullen face, and an astonished Valefor.

“What... are you planning?”

“You don’t know? This is called charity. It is the pity granted to the weak by the strong.”

Zagan had thought of a nicer way to comfort her, but only that haughty speech spilled from his mouth.

Back when Zagan was a waif, there was a boy who split his bread with him when Zagan thought he was going to die from starvation. He felt like he was in no small way saved by that action. *Even now, I can still remember the taste of that bread.*

Valefor wasn’t particularly starving to death or anything, but Zagan believed that a meal would have an effect in loosening up her tension.

He didn’t really care if this child hated or liked him, but it wasn’t amusing if she was just frightened of the unthinkable all the time. That was why he thought of doing the same thing that boy did.

Valefor was making a face like she didn’t know whether she should be angry or afraid, but Nephy quickly returned with a cart, carrying food over to her.

“Here you are.”

Looking at the dish Nephy presented to her, Valefor’s face was finally colored by humiliation.

“Just so you know, I hate people who waste food more than anything. Especially if you waste Nephy’s cooking... I’ll kill you, you got that?” Those words were his true feelings, and Valefor shuddered with a start as she received the soup plate.

After that, she cautiously picked up the spoon and scooped up some soup.

“Ah... It’s... tasty.”

“Hmph. Of course it is.” As Zagan boastfully nodded, the tip of Nephy’s ears turned bashfully red.

“I am honored.”

Having grown somewhat embarrassed, Zagan stood up.

“Well then, I’m returning to the archives. After you finish eating that, follow Nephy in her work.”

And, as he was about to leave the room just like that, Valefor let out a bewildered voice.

“W-Wait.”

“...What is it now?”

“Are you not worried... that I’ll attack this woman? No, even if I don’t, do you not think I’ll run away or something?”

“Do as you will,” Zagan replied without a hint of concern.

“If you understand the meaning of running away from me when I know your secret, or even if you do not, then it would be fine for you to do so.”

It was something Valefor herself said. If a young dragon acted rashly, it would be easier to target them than an elf.

Well, I don’t really intend to spread rumors or anything, though.

Even so, if he released her without any punishment at all, then it would put all the time he spent tormenting those intruders to waste.

The reason he ordered her to clean as punishment was only that level of concern. Moreover, Nephy would be able to teach her about the rights and wrongs of the world far better than him.

And following up on that, Zagan pointed over to Nephy with his gaze.

“Also—”

The answer to her other question was exceedingly clear.

“It seems like you’re misunderstanding things here. Listen, Nephy is far stronger than someone like you, alright?”

It may have been a different matter if it was the same Nephy he had initially met, but right now Nephy possessed a proper will to live. And so, Nephy even surpassed an Angelic Knight. Furthermore, the barrier of this castle was naturally also taking action to protect Nephy.

Defeating Nephy within Zagan’s domain was something that would even be difficult for someone with a Sacred Sword.

Leaving Nephy and the dumbfounded little girl behind, Zagan made his way toward the archives.



Having said that, it’s not going to turn into something dangerous, right?

Several hours later, after having left the room for the moment, Zagan became worried about how Nephy and Valefor were doing and was watching them from afar. When it came to sheer ability, he didn’t believe there was any way that Nephy would lose, but he didn’t know what would happen if Valefor launched a surprise attack.

After he started thinking of such things, he was no longer able to keep his hands on what he was investigating, and as a result, he ended up erasing his presence and sneakily followed them around.

Currently, it seemed they were tidying up the tableware and making the preparations for dinner. The reason that there was a somewhat larger portion than usual was likely because even Valefor's share was being prepared.

It also seemed that Valefor had judged it would not be wise to defy Zagan and Nephy. She was helping out with the cleaning, just as he'd ordered.

Incidentally, she was wearing a robe atop her shoulders. Somehow, the size of the one she was wearing from the beginning matched her height using sorcery. No, that may have been its original size, and she just made it bigger to match the armor.

At any rate, it wasn't an outfit that made it difficult for him to look at her.

"Valefor, please put this plate back."

"...Foll is fine." It appeared that she wasn't as wary of Nephy as she was of Zagan, as Valefor said that in a timid tone. And after that, she mumbled with a stutter.

"Um, Nephy... did you make... the soup?"

"Yes. I alone make all the meals here."

"It was... very good."

It seemed saying it was alright to call her by her nickname was her own way of showing gratitude.

"I see. I'm glad you enjoyed it." Though Nephy's face remained expressionless, the tips of her pointed ears quivered as she nodded.

"Then, Foll, please take care of this."

"...Mm."



Even though she was a dragon, her appearance was that of a small child. The image of her pattering about at Nephy's feet looked somewhat charming to Zagan. And while he was absorbed in the scene, Nephy asked Valefor a question.

"Do you find... Master Zagan scary?"

"...Mm."

"Master Zagan may look scary, but in truth he's actually kind, you know?"

Well, when Nephy first met Zagan she was also quite frightened. Zagan was aware of his evil countenance, so it was no wonder they were frightened by it.

However, Valefor shook her head energetically. Her green braids were swaying like tails behind her.

"His face isn't scary. In fact, I think I'd call him handsome if his face could split open just a bit more."

"Is... that so?" He would have truly had the face of a monster if it could split open, though.

I see... So it's a difference in aesthetic sense, then... Even if he was called handsome by dragon standards, being recognized as inhuman conversely made him feel down.

And, as Nephy tilted her head to the side, Valefor continued speaking.

"What's scary... is his power. I couldn't reach him... at all."

And this was also a pretty natural reaction. *Well, I guess it's unreasonable to not be afraid of the one who slugged you, huh?*

It was at least good that he got her to understand he wouldn't do anything like snatch her up and eat her.

Seeing Valefor like that, Nephy gently spoke to her.

"It's alright. Master Zagan is not one who would wield his power without cause."

Hearing that, even Zagan tilted his head to the side. *Huh? I'm not?* He was making his best effort not to kill anyone in front of Nephy, but even so he had reduced bandits and sorcerers who didn't know their place to cinders.

And yet, Valefor nodded in response.

"...Mm. He didn't even show me... a fragment of his true strength."

I'm not gonna seriously hit a kid with all my strength! He firmly opposed it, but he couldn't really say anything after having already struck her once. If he knew she was such a small child, he would have thought of a somewhat better way of dealing with her the first time around, though...

Valefor then muttered something in confusion.

“...A weird human.”

“You’re correct, he definitely is a mysterious gentleman.” As one would expect, Nephy knew how to choose her words.

And while Zagan felt like that was healing him, Nephy threw out a question once more.

“Foll, what do you plan on doing from now on?”

“...I don’t know. I’m far too powerless... to target the other Archdemons.”

“In the end, do you need power?”

“...Mm.”

It was like she was a lost child... No, she was in fact a child. Either way, hearing that voice made Zagan make an uncomfortable face.

I thought the dragons of legend... were supposed to be more patient creatures.

They were a legendary race that was said to live several hundred, thousand, and should circumstances permit, even tens of thousands of years. And yet, it looked to him like Valefor was feeling impatience on the scale of a human.

In the first place, why is a young dragon pretending to be a sorcerer in human lands? It was a baffling story no matter how one put it. And while he was thinking about that matter deeply, Valefor asked Nephy a question.

“Nephy, why do you follow that man?”

“I was... purchased by Master Zagan and he brought here. Yet, Master Zagan treated me not as a slave, but as a normal person. That’s how I know... this is where I belong.”

“...I see.” For some reason, that voice sounded both lonely and envious to Zagan.

Nephy likely also thought much the same. Stopping what she was doing, she squatted down in front of Valefor and lined up with her gaze.

“Foll, do you not have a place like that?”

“...No,” she replied, her voice trembling from solitude.

This is why I hate brats...

Zagan could only make a sullen face as he learned more of a situation he wanted no part of.



Several days had passed. Valefor was still somewhat frightened, but she seemed to have relaxed her guard to the point where Zagan could hold a normal conversation with her. And so, she listened to Zagan’s orders without any complaints, much like she did previously with Nephy.

Since Zagan himself never gave her any extreme orders, she

obediently worked as Nephy's assistant for the most part. It seemed that when she was left alone with Nephy, she talked quite a bit.

Well, it's probably best for Nephy to have another girl to spend time with. That was why Zagan quietly left the two of them on their own.

And today, he was once again reading a large number of tomes in the archives, but...

"So this is the last of the books that I brought over from Marchosias' castle, huh?"

He was almost finished reading through every new book he had gotten his hands on.

But there wasn't any info on demons or the Sigil of the Archdemon at all. As he thought, there seemed to be a need for him to search through Marchosias' legacy once more.

However, when he scoured through it last time, he wasn't able to find anything more conspicuous than what he already had. If he just went over without thinking of anything new, then he'd probably get the exact same results.

"If I had... one other sorcerer..." The old Zagan never would have thought of such a thing. A sorcerer who possessed different knowledge from him, and thought in a different way. It was a problem that his personal disciple, Nephy, was unable to help out with.

When he thought of sorcerers other than himself, the first one that came to mind was his undesirable friend, Barbatos, but nothing good would come of showing him the legacy of an Archdemon.

Next, another face came to mind, but just how much would he be able to trust them? It made it difficult to decide.

And then, Zagan thought of another approach to the problem. *Perhaps I should look into a field other than sorcery?* The first thing that came to mind as a potential avenue was the church.

It was an organization which revered a so-called 'one and only god,' and clad their members in Anointed Armor that granted enough power to oppose a sorcerer. Of course, it was also an existence which could be called his natural enemy. Among them, there were a mere twelve Archangels who wielded Sacred Swords. And that group were said to be even able to rival Archdemons if they joined forces.

It wouldn't be strange if they held knowledge that sorcerers did not possess, but even as an Archdemon, it wasn't wise for Zagan to tread on their domain.

Suddenly, he recalled the face of a certain awkward girl. *Now that I think of it, has she been safe after that?* Chastille, the Maiden of the Sacred Sword, had once fought against Zagan, but for some reason she was also Nephy's friend. He ended up saving her after she was captured by Barbatos, but he didn't know just what had happened to her after that.

Well, not like anything good can come of an Angelic Knight and a sorcerer meeting.

She was a girl who was far too serious in the oddest ways. He thought it best for both of them that they didn't meet, but he also couldn't help but remember she was trying her best to allow Zagan to escape when they last fought.

If they met again, she might once more hesitate to kill Zagan, or she might try to strangely cover for him again and end up driving herself into a corner.

It wasn't like Zagan particularly asked for it, but watching someone fall into ruin because of him did leave a bad taste in his mouth.

I guess I'll try asking Nephy later, then.

Given his position, it would be most convenient if she was actually dead. However, as a person, he wished her no harm. The thought of her dying without him ever being aware made him feel quite sad.

Though, Zagan only truly worried about it to that extent.

"There's a huge mound of problems huh...?" And as he said that and stretched out, the door to the archives opened without a sound.

Valefor, is it?

In a rare turn of events, she was alone. Zagan turned around to face the young girl, who was silently standing still at the entrance to the archives.

"Do you need something?"

"Dinner... is ready." She was being cautious as always, but her voice held no hint of hostility in it.

After hearing that, Zagan shut the open book in his hands and nodded.

"I see. I'll head over now."

Valefor continued looking up at Zagan as he set aside the book and started walking toward the dining hall.

"Looks like you have something you want to say, Valefor."

"Why... have you not killed me?"

It seemed she had opened her heart a little to Nephy, yet still suspected Zagan.

And Zagan merely shrugged his shoulders and uttered a simple, short response.

"I've said it many times now, haven't I? Nephy is fond of you. That's why I let you live."

"So what... do you just assume I won't ever try to take you by surprise?"

Zagan made a bitter smile as he heard those words. Just the other day, he had a similar exchange with his undesirable friend Barbatos.

Though she looks like a child, she's a true sorcerer when it comes to things like this.

He thought there was something wrong with a dragon acting like a human, but Zagan simply replied with a snort.

"There's a guy I know who said something similar once. Back then, I told him to come at me at any time. He knows a lot about good alcohol, you see? And so, each time I strike him down, he brings over some quality liquor," Zagan said, then finally turned back around.

"That's why I'll say the same thing to you. Come at me whenever you want. Each loss will add more time to your sentence, so you'll have to keep working under Nephy."

If Nephy's growing attached to you, then it'd be great if you could stay forever! His actions were absolutely not because he was moved by her lonely voice from the other day.

And Foll's expression grew dangerous in response to that haughty reply.

"Do you not worry... that I'll steal all your damn knowledge?"

There were over ten thousand books in his archive. After gaining access to Marchosias' legacy, that number only grew, so even Zagan didn't have a grasp of the accurate count anymore.

A sorcerer's knowledge... was a stockpile of each and every single one of the books they held.

Fundamentally, sorcery grew in power by making a magic circle more complex. Though it was also possible to not use a magic circle and replace it with a spell or apparatus, the basic structure never changed.

And the things that made use of those complex designs... was the fine details of a crest's design, which were known as 'circuits.'

Each of these books explained one of those circuits, and it could even be said that understanding one book would be akin to gaining mastery of one new circuit. Of course, the word 'understanding' here didn't mean just knowing how to add a circuit to a magic circle. No, it was something that indicated one would be able to manipulate it in any form.

That was why sorcery could be 'stolen.'

If Valefor was anywhere close to Zagan in power, then she would be able to understand an equal amount of books.

By that logic, the criteria for being an Archdemon candidate is accumulating over ten thousand of those. The number of circuits wasn't necessarily something that created a gap in quality, but it was still a criteria.

If Valefor were to steal all the 'circuits' here, she may even have been able to overwhelm Zagan.

However, Zagan simply shrugged his shoulders as if he weren't

particularly concerned.

“Not really. Go right ahead.”

“Wha...” Valefor opened her eyes wide in shock at Zagan’s reply, which sounded as if he was ridiculing her for stating the obvious.

“What, you find that surprising?”

“Do you... expect me not to be?” Foll just so happened to have an expression of shock on her face as she said that.

I don't have any interest in what happens to the grimoires I've already studied.

Zagan never went back to read a book after mastering a new circuit. And so, all the books he had piled up were of no use to him anymore. That was why he didn’t really care if they were stolen or burned or whatever.

Perhaps his ability to fully comprehend everything upon reading it once was the reason he was granted the title of Archdemon.

However, it seemed Valefor was unable to understand his logic. She continued to look up at Zagan, her confused expression stuck to her face all the while.

Eventually, after scratching his head, Zagan replied like he found her stare bothersome.

“In my mind, techniques and knowledge are simply things to ‘steal.’ Even I took from the sorcerer who was first here... His name was Andras or something, I believe... Well, at any rate, I killed him and stole his knowledge.”

It was something he did during his days as a waif, back when he was abducted to be a sacrifice. At that time, Zagan turned the tables on Andras and became a sorcerer.

The reason Zagan, who was just a human, could kill a sorcerer was because he saw Andras’ sorcery... and stole it. And even now, the technique to do so had become the cornerstone of his power.

The amount which is stolen... is proportional to the amount of power you have.

That was why he thought he had no right to stop someone who was hell bent on stealing his sorcery.

“Of course, I won’t attentively teach you like I do with Nephy. But at the same time, whether you sneak into the archives and read all the grimoires or memorize my sorcery by watching, I have no intention of hindering you. Though, if you go and steal or tear up a book I haven’t read yet, then it’s a different story.”

Having said that, he already scanned over all of the tomes he had brought from Marchosias’ legacy. There was nothing left that he was desperate to hold on to.

Besides, I can't complain if she does the same things I once did.

The reason he went out of his way to tell her that may have been

because he saw his old self overlapping with her.

Zagan was an incorrigible rascal, but even so, there was a boy who acted like an older brother and lent him a hand. If nothing else, he wanted to at least mimic that boy's behavior.

Valefor then shook her head.

"...I can't understand that. You're arrogant. You should be able to force me to obey you through sheer strength. Why not do that?"

I mean, that would just make Nephy sad, right!? Even if she didn't show it, he felt like she would scorn him for it. It wouldn't be all that much, but it was still something that he couldn't possibly bear.

And in response to Valefor, who had no way of knowing his circumstances, Zagan snorted with a 'hmph.'

"I don't know how long you've lived as a dragon, or how excellent a sorcerer you are, but you are a mere child in my presence. And children should quarrel and throw tantrums as they see fit. There are none here who would take offense to that, I assure you."

It wasn't that he wanted to be liked. No, it was just that he couldn't leave her be.

He himself couldn't explain how he felt, so Zagan roughly rubbed Valefor's head to distract from his thoughts.

However, much to his surprise, Foll didn't brush off his hand. He had expected her to at least get angry and bite at him, but...

On the contrary—

"A child..." As she said that, for some reason, tears began welling up in her eyes.

Huh? Is this my fault? Did I mess up? Sure, she was a dragon, but any ordinary onlooker would assume he'd just made a child cry. And even Zagan lost his presence of mind at that thought.

"G-Gaaah, don't cry!"

"I'm not... crying."

Zagan was at a loss as he watched her wipe her face with both hands.

"Urgh, a-anyways, it's time for dinner, right? Let's go. Nephy's cooking is good enough to stop those tears in their tracks," Zagan said, as he took Foll's hand and headed toward the dining hall.

And the fact that Valefor was tightly squeezing his hand in return... Well, that was something he pretended not to realize.



"Is it tasty, Foll?"

"Mm... It's tasty." Valefor was crying in the archives, but had stopped by the time they reached the dining hall. And following the flow of events that occurred once they reached their destination, the three inhabitants of the castle were now having dinner. Their seating

order ended up with Zagan at the head of the table, Nephy to his left, and Valefor on his right.

Oddly, Valefor had become all friendly, acting as if that was how she'd always been.

What a selfish girl. Zagan was the one who said her tears would stop if she had dinner, but he couldn't really accept such a radical change in her.

And, just as he felt he was about to let out a sigh, Valefor shifted her attention to him. Her feet, which couldn't quite reach the floor, dangled about playfully as she gazed at him inquisitively.

"...What is it this time?" Valefor suddenly cast her eyes downward as Zagan pointed a suspicious gaze over to her. Since she was still clearly frightened of him, the young girl spoke up as if she was mustering all her courage.

"...Zagan."

"What?"

"...Getting in the way... of dinner before... Um, it was my bad." She was likely talking about the first day they met. The time she came charging into his castle. And hearing that apology made Zagan stare back at her in wonder.

"I got in the way of you eating Nephy's delicious food. It's only natural that you got so angry."

"H-Hmph... As long as you understand."

He never thought that she would apologize, so Zagan raised his voice as if trying to cover up his bewilderment.

At the same time, a certain thought occurred to him.

Well, it'll probably be fine if it's her.

He didn't for a second believe that a relationship of mutual trust had developed over just a few days, but he *did* know she was someone he could cooperate with.

At the very least, it made no sense for her to remain hostile toward Zagan, as she clearly understood the benefits she would gain by obeying him.

As Zagan fully realized all that, he turned to face Nephy.

"More importantly, Nephy, I was thinking of taking this girl along and going out for a little tomorrow. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Do you have some business to care of?"

"Indeed. I was thinking of going to Marchosias' castle... I wish to investigate Archdemon Palace."

The real name of Marchosias' castle was unknown, but sorcerers called it 'Archdemon Palace' out of reverence.

Hearing that name made Valefor stand up with a bang... However, because of her height, her line of sight had gotten even lower.

"The former Archdemon's castle... you say?"

“Yeah. I’ve already looked through it once before, but the knowledge I desire wasn’t written down in any of the books I brought back. That’s why I’m going back again.”

He was looking for anything on demons or the Sigil of the Archdemon.

No matter how I think about it, there’s no way nothing would turn up after how hard I searched...

It seemed that Marchosias really didn’t want others to know anything of those matters.

Valefor then spoke up, as if on guard.

“...Are you sane? That would be the same as granting me the knowledge of the Eldest.”

Eldest was Marchosias’ second name. Because the ex-Archdemon had lived for a thousand years, at some point in time, he earned that name.

Naturally, the amount of knowledge that he had accumulated was colossal. If they went to investigate things there, she would be able to at least hide and steal a look at books as much as she liked. If the dragon Valefor were to gain even more knowledge, it may have even been possible for her to defeat Zagan and the other Archdemons.

And yet, Zagan nodded as if it didn’t matter at all.

“I do believe I told you this already, but I have no problem with you stealing knowledge.”

Valefor’s face became more and more contorted, as if to mirror her confusion.

“I’m... your enemy, you know?”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, you’re right. But you might say I’m short on hands. As long as you help me search for what I want, I’ll allow you to run amok as you please.”

He had been keeping an eye on her the past few days and noticed that Valefor held no real sense of hostility toward Zagan or Nephy. Thus, it likely wouldn’t be a problem to have her help search through Marchosias’ legacy.

Honestly, I’d prefer to go with just Nephy and me, but...

Unfortunately, Valefor was still a sorcerer. Moreover, she was a dragon who might possess knowledge that only dragons knew. As such, she would surely be helpful for searching through Marchosias’ legacy.

Besides, frankly speaking, he wanted a hand in managing Marchosias’ castle.

He didn’t think his undesirable friend Barbatos would provide proper reports for him, and Nephy’s friend Manuela wasn’t a sorcerer. Even her one other friend, Chastille, was an Angelic Knight of the church.

That was why he wanted to leave its management to Foll, if she proved capable, anyway.

That was just how highly Zagan regarded the truth behind demons and the Sigil of the Archdemon.

After thinking for a while, Zagan cleared his throat with a cough and muttered.

“Besides, being an Archdemon’s subordinate should suit your needs well. It’s about time those guys outside understand that it’s not worth it to oppose me, too. That’s why, well, um, how do I put it...”

“Huh...? What are you trying to say?”

Zagan averted his gaze and continued his speech as Valefor tilted her head quizzically.

“No matter your identity, there cannot be many fools who would dare lay their hands on you after learning it would offend me.”

It would mean that, just like Nephy, Valefor would fall under the patronage of an Archdemon.

In practice, Valefor was the last one to attack him, and no more intruders had shown up in Zagan’s domain since. There may have been lost people or Angelic Knights trespassing, but there would likely be no more sorcerers who were openly hostile to him.

Well, if I can’t protect this lone girl, then there’s no chance of me protecting Nephy for the rest of her life. That was the only reason for his decision. It absolutely was not because a young girl who had no place to return to weighed on his mind. If he said that was his real reason, then that was all.

Even so, as he took a fleeting glimpse over toward Valefor, he noticed she was letting her gaze wander between Zagan and Nephy as if she couldn’t believe it.

Before long, perhaps finally feeling she could trust him, Valefor timidly nodded.

“Under...stood.”

“Good.”

As Zagan nodded, Valefor glared back at him in discontent.

“...But I’m not just ‘you,’ okay?”

“Hm? Ah, about your name, huh? I got it, don’t worry. Come with me, Valefor.”

However, Valefor’s mouth was still shifting about as if she had something difficult to say. And eventually, she timidly opened her mouth to speak.

“Foll... is fine.” That was the first time that Valefor— no, Foll, came to a compromise with Zagan.

Scratching at his cheek, Zagan then corrected himself as he spoke.

“Ah, okay... Then, I’ll count on you tomorrow... Foll.”

“Got it.”

And with that, Zagan and Nephy closed the distance between them and their new freeloader little by little.



“...Seriously, to think she would just sleep the moment she finished eating. A dragon brat’s no different from a human one, huh?” Zagan lowered Foll down onto the guest room’s bed as he slung that insult at her.

Foll passed out with her spoon in hand during dinner, while Zagan and Nephy were having a pleasant chat. And since there was no other option, Zagan ended up having to carry Foll.

Nephy took Foll’s robe off for her skillfully, straightened it out, and placed it on a hanger to make sure it didn’t get wrinkled.

“I do believe this child is quite tired. I’m sure everything since she first came here has been a series of firsts for her.”

Zagan made a sullen expression as he heard Nephy say that.

“However, this is enemy territory in her eyes, right? Would you normally sleep with no wariness like this?”

He had only been repeating words that Foll herself used.

However, Nephy shook her head, a knowing smile on her face.

“Master Zagan, was it not you who taught her that we are not enemies?”

“Huh?”

Nephy’s pointy ears then quivered in a somewhat delighted manner.

“At first, she was extremely on guard, and I think she was quite scared. But now... I think she’s able to sleep peacefully like this because she knows she’s in a safe place.” Nephy looked up at Zagan’s face in a somewhat embarrassed manner as she said that.

“I was... also the same, after all.”

Zagan recalled the first day he brought Nephy over. He allowed the day to pass without ever figuring out how to properly speak to the girl he loved. Unlike this time, he wasn’t able to prepare a personal room for Nephy in time, so they slept in the throne room.

That meant Foll had also finally let down her guard toward Zagan.

“Th-That’s, um, well... You belong to me. I treat what is mine... as precious... That’s all there is to it.”

“Yes. Thank you very much.” Even though he spoke as if she was an object again, Nephy replied happily.

Zagan averted his eyes as he began to remember his embarrassment at the time, which was compounded by her embarrassment from her longing gaze.

“Nephy, what about you. Is this good with you?”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“I mean, about having Foll stay in this castle. I didn’t consult you at all...”

And, just as he asked her that, Nephy stared at him in wonder as if surprised by his question. Her ears stiffened to a point, and he could tell that she was considerably confused.

And eventually, Nephy’s lips loosened into a faint smile.

“Yes. All is as your heart wills, Master Zagan.”

“I-I see.”

Now unable to calm himself, Zagan shifted his attention over to Foll.

“...Good grief. This girl... She’s still holding onto that spoon?”

While Foll was sound asleep, her hand was still gripping a spoon. And so, Zagan went to pull it out of her hand. And, at that exact moment...

“H-Hey...”

Just what was she thinking about? Foll gripped onto Zagan’s finger, hard.

It’s soft, huh?

It was a different sensation from that of Nephy’s slender and hot hand. A hand that was childish, which had a squishy elasticity to it.

After doing that, she muttered something in a somewhat lonely manner.

“Father...”

She was likely seeing a dream of her parents. Foll spoke in a delicate voice, which made it seem unthinkable that she was a dragon who aimed to take Zagan’s life.

Zagan didn’t know what parental relations for a dragon were like, but it seemed she was recalling her parent dragon. And watching her figure sleep talking like that, he realized she truly was the spitting image of a young girl.

I’m real bad... with brats, though...

Zagan himself knew nothing about parents. Or rather, even though he was trying to act like an older brother, she ended up recalling her father, so being seen as someone so old made him feel down.

However, even so, Zagan was unable to fling off the frail hand that was gripping his finger. And so, in a rare event, a laugh spilled out from Nephy.

“What’s wrong?”

“No, um... It’s almost little like... we had a child, isn’t it?”

A-A-A-A *child*? It was likely different from how Zagan was calling Foll a brat. No, Nephy meant it in the sense that it was their child, as if Zagan and Nephy were the parents.

Even though we haven’t kissed yet... a child!? Forget making babies,

I'm still too nervous about just holding hands!

One look at Zagan's wide open eyes made Nephy realize how her words came across. In a flash, not just her face, but even the points of her ears had turned bright red.

"Th-That's not what I meant! Um, Master Zagan, it seems like you intend to take Foll under your patronage, and that naturally makes me think of that sort of relationship, so..."

"Ah, um... I-I get it. I understand, alright? Don't worry."

The two of them were no longer able to look directly at each other, and sweat began running down both their faces.

After mulling over her thoughts for a while, Nephy tightly gripped onto Zagan's sleeve. And, as Zagan wrapped his own finger around that hand, Nephy also timidly gripped onto his finger.

What is this? Somehow, it's warm...

Foll gripping his right hand, and Nephy gripping his left one... The situation felt strangely comfortable to him.

Family... Perhaps that was the word Nephy wanted to say. Zagan obviously knew about it, even if his knowledge was only something he'd gained through books. It was a word which signified the relationship between siblings, married couples, and those who supported them.

However, Zagan and Nephy didn't really know how it worked in practice. That was why they were unable to bring that word up on the spur of the moment.

The first image that came to mind when the word family was mentioned... was the image of a child joining hands with their parents. It was something that had nothing to do with Zagan, but he had at least seen it before in town.

One day, will we also look like that?

The word sorcerer was like a synonym for villain. As such, it may have been comical for he who stood at its peak as an Archdemon to wish for ordinary happiness, but Zagan swore it would be done. And then, he vowed that he would protect all of them.

Perhaps that was far too meager a wish for an Archdemon, but Zagan felt affection for the simple idea of a happy family.



The next morning, Zagan visited the town of Kianoides with Nephy and Foll in tow. Archdemon Palace was hidden near the town. For you see, the castle of the Eldest was an underground labyrinth.

However, Zagan didn't immediately head toward Archdemon Palace, and was walking around town.

"Zagan, where are we going?"

"A clothing shop."

“Why?”

“Do you plan to walk around town in that outfit?”

Nephy was dressed in her usual maid uniform, which was fine, but Foll was wearing the same robe as always. In other words, all she had under it was a plain undershirt. And perhaps because of that, Foll was looking at her surroundings restlessly.

Plus, it's probably better to at least hide her horns.

Currently, she was wearing her hood all the way down to her eyes so they couldn't be seen, but even the wind could have blown it off her head. It would have been far better to provide her a cap or something along those lines. Or that was the plan, anyway, yet Foll squinted her eyes as if she were discontent.

“You're the one who told me to leave my armor behind, Zagan.”

“Of course I did. Even with Nephy in her maid uniform, any passerby would run away from us if you were in that!”

Nephy was on good terms with the townsfolk. In fact, there were a fair number of people who talked to her regularly, so Zagan wanted to make sure they didn't scare them off.

However, the one who leaked out anxious words was Nephy.

“When you say clothing shop, you mean...?”

“Yeah, her shop is familiar to us, so isn't it fine?”

“I do think that Manuela is a good person, but, um, when it comes to clothing... Are you certain it will be alright?”

As always, there was no change in Nephy's expression, but her slackened ears were unable to hide her anxiety. And seeing their reactions made Foll tilt her head to the side.

“A sorcerer?”

“No, a normal person. She's also rather kind.”

“Is that so...?” As one would expect, Nephy's words had chipped away at his persuasive power. Due to that fact, Foll gripped Zagan's robe as if she was frightened.

Nephy was good friends with the clerk of that clothing shop, but she was a bit of an eccentric and often used Nephy as a dress up doll. Zagan was also somewhat troubled by her lecherous actions, but Manuela was someone he could rely on when it came to the quality of clothing.

Besides, knowing her, she won't tell anyone even if she realizes Foll's a dragon. He was confident of that fact because, as far as he'd observed, Manuela considered Nephy a true friend.

Zagan spoke up, attempting to grant Foll some peace of mind.

“Even she wouldn't make a small brat like this wear weird clothing, right?”

“I... wonder...”

What's the point if even you're getting more nervous, Nephy! Stop that!

Her constant worrying had made even Zagan reconsider his belief in their friendship.

And with heavy hearts all around, the group in question reached Manuel's clothing shop.

"Welcome!" An energetic voice called out to them immediately as they opened the door.

What awaited them on the other side was an avian girl with beautiful green wings. It seemed she was once again wandering around the shop with a cheerful smile on her face.

Yes, they spotted the young female clerk, Manuela. And Nephy immediately bowed her head in deference to her with a bob.

"Good day, Manuela."

"So you came by again today, Nephy?"

"Yes... Um, we came here to pick up some clothes..."

"Of course... Er, what, so the master's here too, huh?" Manuela finally shifted her attention over to Zagan, treating him as a total nuisance the entire time.

However, Zagan simply returned a grimace and began questioning her.

"Hey, you haven't been making Nephy try on anything weird while I'm not around, have you?"

"Oh my, whatever gave you that idea? I only pick out clothes from among the shop's merchandise, you know?"

"This shop... has a mountain of indecent clothes lying about, though," Zagan said. Then, he glared at her as Manuela let out a whistle and feigned ignorance.

"...Good grief. Well, anyway, we're not here for Nephy this time. I'd like you to pick out something suitable for this girl," Zagan said as he pushed Foll forward.

"Huh, did you hire a new servant or something at your place, Zagan? Let me have a look here..." Manuela muttered as she pulled Foll's hood off.

Manuela's eyes began energetically sparkling as Foll's green hair and golden eyes were revealed.

"Oh my...! So cute."

"Er..." Perhaps finding her someone difficult to deal with, Foll hid behind Zagan. However, Manuela firmly grabbed her arm.

"Mmm... Yes, this is yet another diamond in the rough... Though, in a different way from Nephy! Just leave it to me. I'll make her extremely cute for you!"

"...Don't make her wear anything too strange, alright?"

"It'll be fine, just trust me."

Foll shot a look of distress over to Zagan, but she was mercilessly pulled away by Manuela.

“Will it... really be alright, I wonder?”

“Well, it should be fine, right?”

The two of them let their gazes wander around while fiddling about with the cuffs of their clothing restlessly. It was as if they were seeing their child off as they went to run their first errand.

And a few quick minutes after that, the curtains to the dressing room opened.

Zagan and Nephy let out a sigh of admiration as they watched Foll totter out. It seemed she was wearing an outfit that resembled the native dress of a foreign country.

Manuela likely matched it to Foll's green hair. It was a splendid ensemble that mixed calm colors with white and red, and it somehow even managed to work her horns looks into the outfit. And over her shoulders, she was wearing her robe.

“How's this? The robe actually fits into this one quite well, right? Plus, it even emphasizes her cutest features.”

“...You can do this when you try, so why don't you work properly all the time?” Her choice of clothes was certainly splendid, but it merely made Zagan let out a sigh.

However, Manuela shook her head as if to tell him he didn't understand.

“Helping our dear customers discover a brand new part of themselves is a part of our job, you know?”

“Your standard choices are far too extreme for that.” Having said that, Zagan shifted his focus over to Foll.

“So, don't you think it suits you? Do you like it, Foll?”

“...I don't know. Human clothing... is all the same to me.”

Even though she was saying that, the face she was making as she pulled on the hems of her skirt didn't seem all that dissatisfied.

“Doesn't this... stand out too much?”

“I don't really mind.” On the contrary, he felt it would be best if news of her accompanying Zagan spread far and wide. If that happened, then the number of people willing to do harm to Foll would inevitably decrease in number.

At the very least, there were none who dared to lay their hands on Nephy when she walked around on her own.

Still, despite all that, Zagan found something that irked him.

“It wouldn't match if you lowered the hood, would it?” If her horns were exposed, then individuals who knew Foll was a dragon would appear.

Sure, Zagan wanted to proudly display that she was under his patronage, but he knew it would be hard to do that if her real identity got out.

The reason Nephy was fine despite being a white-haired elf was

because she was loved even by the townspeople. It was not necessarily true that Foll would fall under the same category.

And while Zagan worked himself into a bundle of nerves with those thoughts, Manuela immediately clapped her hands.

“If you’re worried about that, then how about this kind of robe?” After saying that, she placed another robe on Foll’s shoulders. There were scarlet ornaments here and there, but it was a robe with a snow white inlay, and the hood was shaped like some sort of cat caricature. Conveniently enough, Foll’s horns settled into the hollow ears snugly.



“I see. Not bad. What do you think, Nephy?”

“Yes. It is rather cute, I think it’s good,” Nephy said, the tips of her ears quivering somewhat happily as she did so.

“Then it’s decided. I’ll take this.”

“Thank you very much for your patronage!”

While removing the price tag and such from Foll’s clothing, Manuela asked a question as if to tease them.

“So, this child... Foll, was it? Did you adopt her or something?”

“That’s not really the case, but...” Now that she mentioned it, how was Zagan supposed to explain the situation?

It would be overdoing it to say that she was a sorcerer who attacked his castle and that he had decided to take her under his wing. Although, Manuela calling Foll an adopted child was somewhat out there in its own sense.

And while worrying over such thoughts, Zagan turned the question around.

“Ah... Um, is that... what it looks like to you?”

“Well, yeah. Rather than siblings, you’ve got more of a parent and child feel to you... There, and we’re done.” Manuela finished with the price tags, straightened out the disheveled portions of the skirt, and stood back up.

Foll then ran over to Zagan and hid behind him as if to imply that she was scared.

“Well, I don’t really want to pry too much... It’s fine by me as long as it doesn’t make Nephy unhappy.”

“Hmph. A wise decision.” In truth, he wanted to thank her since she really did help, yet only those chastising words traveled out of Zagan’s mouth.

However, Manuela had also gotten used to it already, so all she did was make a bitter smile that didn’t seem to actually affect her mood.

“Anyways, come back any time.”

“Yes. Thank you very much, Manuela,” Nephy said. Then, she bowed her head once more, which Foll mimicked.

“Thank you... I really like... the clothes.”

Watching that reaction made Manuela break out into a broad smile.

“Holy crap. What’s with this kid, she’s super cute! Can I take her home after all? Oh, wait, it’d be the opposite here, huh? Could you just leave her behind?”

“Gaaah, calm down! She’s not an object! Sheesh, like I’d just hand her over to you, of all people!”

Zagan screamed at Manuela, grabbed Foll’s hand, and left the

shop behind in a fluster.



“... Seriously, that’s why going to her shop is such a pain.”

As Zagan squared his shoulders and walked on, Nephy spoke up in a somewhat happy tone.

“Still, I do believe it was the correct choice to select Manuela’s shop.”

As she said that, Zagan looked back at Foll, who he was still leading by the hand. Foll was still walking somewhat unsteadily, but she seemed to be pleased with the clothes themselves. At the very least, she didn’t show any signs of disliking them, and she even looked subtly happy.

And perhaps having noticed Zagan’s gaze, Foll tilted her head to the side.

“What?”

“No... Those clothes... do you like them?”

“Mm.” Contrary to his expectation, she obediently nodded.

“I see. Good for you, then.”

“Mhm... Thank you, Zagan.” She was likely talking about the cost of the clothes. Foll wasn’t smiling, but she said that without giving off any signs of being worked up either.

After that, Nephy held Foll’s empty hand. And Zagan was left taken aback by how the three of them were lined up, walking along with Foll in the middle.

What exactly is this feeling...? Perhaps it could be described as strangely warm, or perhaps as happiness. Either way, it definitely wasn’t a bad feeling, but it was an emotion that he had never felt before.

Would it be correct to call it affection?

However, this was a different feeling than when he felt Nephy was dear to him... it was different from love.

Zagan then recalled the words Manuela had used just earlier.

Rather than siblings, you’ve got more of a parent and child feel to you... In other words, that feeling would be something like the ‘desire to protect.’ And now that he was self-conscious of the truth behind that emotion welling up within him, Zagan lost his composure.

Ridiculous... I, of all people... want to protect a brat like this? If someone like Barbatos heard such an emotion was still left within him, they would undoubtedly worry if he was still sane.

However, it was also true that Zagan, who was a villain on the surface, had never had any opportunities to get involved with children.

And while he was racking his brains over that murky feeling he

was unable to attach a word to, he spotted a lone girl walking about straight ahead of him.

She was wearing a silk shirt and a skirt decorated with lace. Her figure as she slowly walked was brimming with something like elegance. She was a pretty girl with red hair which covered her back all the way to her waist.

She seemed to be thinking about something or other, so her eyes were cast down with a gloomy expression.

Zagan felt that her face was familiar, but he couldn't recall exactly who it was right away. Lately, his opportunities to exchange one or two words with the people in town had increased.

And so, he simply assumed it was one of those 'acquaintances' as he tried to walk by her, but the girl looked taken aback as she spotted Zagan.

"Z-Zagan?" It seemed that she did, in fact, know Zagan.

Even her voice is familiar... Whose is she? As he tilted his head to the side, the girl looked at Nephy and made a somewhat relieved face, and then she was startled upon spotting Foll between Zagan and Nephy.

"N-no way... you two... have already gotten close enough to be blessed with a child...?"

"D-D-D-D-D-Don't say such shameless things! Nephy and I have yet to, um..." As he shot a fleeting glimpse over to Nephy, he noticed that even her ears had turned bright red. And when their eyes met, the both of them averted their gaze in a panic.

I wonder... what Nephy thinks of the idea?

Even Zagan was roughly aware of how children were brought into the world. However, back when she asked 'can we sleep together,' it didn't seem like she really understood what she was implying. So, was it really all right for him to put his hands on the soft and fair skin of a girl who didn't even know the meaning of a late night rendezvous?

While Zagan was in anguish over such thoughts, the one who couldn't follow the situation, Foll, tilted her head to the side.

"Zagan, who's that?"

"Oh, right, who *are* you?" No matter how he looked at it, she was an acquaintance of his, but he just couldn't clearly remember her. And as Zagan asked her that in a suspicious tone, both the girl and Nephy were completely shocked.

"N-No way... you don't even remember me?"

"Master Zagan, it's Chastille!"

Tears were quickly forming in the girl's eyes, and Nephy was telling him who it was in a fluster. Upon seeing that girl's face on the verge of tears, Zagan finally managed to match her to the 'Chastille' within his memories.

He didn't recognize her because she wasn't wearing her Anointed Armor, didn't have her Sacred Sword, and her red hair was even let down.

Well, she seems to be healthy. That's good. It was worrying that she wasn't wearing the outfit of an Angelic Knight, but she was at least safe.

"Ah, so it's you? Hear me, Foll, this girl is... Let's see, would it be fine to say she's Nephys's friend?"

"Yes." Watching Nephys return a single quick nod, the girl — Chastille, finally put her hand to her chest in relief.

Chastille had earned the titles Archangel and Maiden of the Sacred Sword. And as those two titles implied, her usual self was a gallant figure clad in the Anointed Armor of the church who carried the burden of wielding one of only twelve Sacred Swords in the world.

...Though, it seemed after peeling off the veneer she was reduced to such an ordinary state.

"So, uh, what's with that outfit?" As Zagan asked her that, Chastille bluntly hesitated to tell him.

"That's, um... Right now, I'm... off duty."

"What. Were you fired or something?"

"Y-You're wrong, you hear!?" Chastille was flustered, as if Zagan was right on the mark.

Sorcerers and Angelic Knights were mortal enemies, but Zagan had still saved Chastille despite that. And in return, Chastille had once made a statement that she would protect Zagan from within the church.

That very thought was something of a failure of her duties as an Angelic Knight. Therefore, the church exiling her wasn't an all too unlikely scenario.

After thinking for a bit, Chastille folded her arms and turned her face away in a huff.

"M-My affairs don't really concern you, do they? More importantly, what's with that child? I didn't take you for a kidnapper, but..."

After Zagan averted his gaze, he bopped Foll's head a few times. The cat-eared hood shook, but it was nicely stuck on her horns and showed no signs of coming off.

"This one's also a sorcerer. As for how we're related, you can imagine whatever you want."

"H-Huh...?" Chastille made an extremely bewildered face as she imagined something or other, but Zagan didn't pay it any mind. After all, as this was going on, he could hear another voice coming from further away.

"Lady Chastille! It is dangerous for you to take a stroll on your

own!”

“If it pleases you, allow us to be your escorts!”

The three stuffy Angelic Knights from before came rushing over. And as they noticed Zagan, they stood in his way as if to guard Chastille.

“Grrr, you’re that bastard Zagan! What are you doing to Lady Chastille?”

It was difficult to even forget this filthy lot, so Zagan nodded.

“Ah, you’re... the Three... Idiots of the Azure Sky, was it?”

“It’s the Three Knights of the Azure Sky!”

“Whatever. I don’t really have any business with her... Hm!?”

Just as he was about to drive them away, right next to him, Foll’s eyes lit up with bloodthirst. And on her arm... were the transformed claws of a dragon.

“Stop that,” Zagan said in a low voice, which made Foll’s body shake with a start.

“...Why?”

“Nephy has many friends in this town. If we go wild in this place, then people will die.” Foll made an extremely dissatisfied face at his words, yet still withdrew.

Do these three idiots have some sort of dispute with Foll, too? Looking at how they immediately grew hostile upon seeing him, it was easy to imagine that they could have gotten involved with other sorcerers as well.

However, the three Angelic Knights didn’t even notice Foll’s blood thirst and, as a result, were only glaring at Zagan. Thinking of her usual outfit as Apparition Valefor, it was only understandable that they couldn’t tie it to Foll’s current figure.

Sensing that it would get troublesome, Zagan waved his hand as if to drive away the Angelic Knights.

“If you don’t have any business with me, then get lost already. I’m busy today.” And even if he wasn’t, it wasn’t really good for the sorcerer Zagan and a bunch of Angelic Knights to have a conversation out in such an open area. It didn’t really bother Zagan, but there was a high probability that something bad would happen to Chastille.

Kind of looks like she’s troubled by something, though... He was thinking about Chastille. However, even if Archdemon Zagan lent a hand to Chastille, the wielder of a Sacred Sword, he would harm her, not help.

The three Angelic Knights then let out a snort with a ‘hmpf.’

“We do not possess the tongue to speak to the damned likes of you to begin with!”

“Come now, let us be off, Lady Chastille. Please think of your own safety right now.”

“Uh, ah, wait...”

Shortly after cutting into the conversation, the Angelic Knights took Chastille away. However, Zagan did not fail to hear the words they left behind at the very end.

‘Please think of your own safety right now.’ It seemed that she had once more gotten involved in some sort of trouble.

Nephy also likely realized the truth. Her eyes were colored with anxiety as she saw Chastille off.

“Is Chastille okay, I wonder?”

“Who knows. However, even like that, she seems to be popular. She has other people that she can rely on.”

If Archdemon Zagan got involved, it would only worsen her position. If he said he wasn’t worried, then that would be a lie, but right now he was more worried about Foll’s attitude as she glared at the back of the Angelic Knights.

“Setting that aside, Foll. Did those guys do something to you?”

“What’s strange... about a sorcerer hating Angelic Knights?”

“Nothing? That’s totally natural.”

It seemed like it was something Foll didn’t want to talk about. The arm she transformed into that of a dragon had turned back to normal, but she bluntly evaded the question.

That just now... was clear and precise hatred, wasn’t it...?

It fundamentally differed from the hostility that she showed the other day when she attacked Zagan’s castle. If she had pointed that kind of hatred toward Zagan at the time, then he would have likely never thought of keeping her close at hand.

And, as Zagan shrugged his shoulders, he gazed off in the direction Chastille and the others went. *It’d be nice if it this doesn’t turn into something troublesome...*

However, as Zagan let out a sigh, he didn’t realize that Chastille was already trying to protect him from ‘something troublesome.’



“We’re here. This is Archdemon Palace.”

Marchosias’ castle was built atop an ancient ruin. It could be said that they were in a similar space to the stage of the dark auction where he first met Nephy.

The majority of it was buried under dirt, but even this underground hollow was vast enough to completely eclipse a small shop, and the surface of the castle wall, which filled it to capacity, was quite imposing. And in the center of the stone wall was a gate that connected to the inside of the castle.

Zagan and Nephy had dropped by before, but this was Foll’s first time witnessing it with her own eyes, so she bent backward as if

overwhelmed by it.

For the time being, there were no signs of her dragging out her quarrel with the Angelic Knights.

“There’s such a structure... underground?”

“Yeah. It was probably something originally on the surface that sank underground. Not sure if it was due to tectonic shifts or Marchosias’ sorcery, though.”

The castle itself was several hundred years old, so it was difficult to search for traces of sorcery. Although, if a whole castle sank into the ground from tectonic shifts, then there should have been some sort of record of that somewhere. In that case, it likely really was something done using Marchosias’ sorcery.

As Zagan was now, he wouldn’t be able to mimic it. It was a truly terrifying power.

If I insist on having it my way, I’ll have to take on twelve such monsters, huh? However, he knew they were a hurdle he would have to overcome someday in order to allow Nephy to live in a place where the sun shined. And as he mulled over such dark thoughts once more, Foll muttered a few words.

“Somehow, it feels nostalgic.”

Zagan stared at her in wonder.

“You’ve been here before?”

“No. It’s just, the atmosphere here... is somehow familiar to where I used to live.”

“Are you sure?” Zagan squatted down and lined up with Foll’s line of sight as he asked her that question.

The young dragon stared back in surprise, but nodded deeply back.

“Yeah... It wasn’t a castle, but the construction of the hollow is similar. Also, the smell’s the same...”

“By smell... you mean...”

“The smell of mana. This is... probably somewhere dragons once lived.”

Those unexpected words shocked Zagan to the core.

That would mean... these are dragon ruins?

If that were the truth, then teaming up with Foll was a great idea after all. After all, even if she was young, Foll was still a dragon.

“Alright. If you find anything related to dragons inside the castle, then report it to me. I don’t care how trivial it may be.”

“Got it. But... if I find a book I like, can I read it?”

“...I don’t care if you bring them back with you, so leave reading them for later.”

“Fine...” Did she really understand him there?

Foll’s cheeks were flushed, and she somehow seemed happy. Had

she maybe been stimulated by the lingering scent of her brethren?

Oh, so that's why she doesn't care about those stupid Angelic Knights anymore, huh? It seemed this was the so-called short attention span that most children were said to have.

Astounded by his discovery, Zagan opened the gate to the castle. And just as he did, a cold air, along with the scent of mold and dust, washed over them.

There were no lights inside, and a darkness hovered in the background that felt like it led to the realm of the dead. And somehow, even now there was an intimidating air floating about as if the Archdemon's mana still lingered.

It was said that Marchosias allowed no humans near him. The care of his daily life was left to familiars and golems that he created.

However, either those had left along with Marchosias' death, or perhaps they vanished and turned back to the lumps of earth they were made from. As it stood, there were none in existence who knew the full details of this castle.

Nephy tightly gripped onto the cuff of Zagan's robe. And Zagan squeezed her hand reassuringly, then walked forth into the castle.

With that one step in, a magic circle sensed the return of its master and the candlesticks along the wall lit up with fire. And like a ripple across a surface of water, the darkness was driven away. Conversely, however, the intimidating air drifting over them grew denser.

"Zagan, what's that?" Foll was pointing at a large sculpture that seemed to be looking down on them. The other side of the gate led into a large hall, but a statue that seemed to be modeled after a demon towering over all who entered inhabited that space.

"Hmm... It's likely a golem or a chimera. Some variety of living being birthed by sorcery, basically."

It could be said that it was a survivor of those who managed this place. Though it was completely petrified, and Zagan couldn't sense even a trace of mana in it.

Hearing that reply, Foll opened her eyes wide.

"Living being... Is it alive, then?"

"So it seems. Unfortunately, I don't know the method of releasing it or setting it to work, though."

Since there was a barrier set around the sculpture, Zagan could tell that it was some sort of apparatus, but he had yet to identify its true nature.

"Could it be... the guard of this place, I wonder?" Nephy tilted her head to the side as she spoke.

"Probably is something like that. It seems that its proper functions have been lost alongside its original master's life. It would be

troublesome if it went berserk, so don't touch it."

"O-Okay..."

Following after Nephy, even Foll grabbed the cuff of Zagan's robe.

Zagan surveyed the hall as complicated feelings compelled him to sigh. He spotted the staircase that led to a second floor where a mysterious jewel was set in place. To the left and right there were passages with several ornaments lined, all of which had sorcery cast on them. Even on the floor, there was a magic circle put in place with a circuit that Zagan had never seen before.

Suffice to say, he had yet to fully grasp the full scale of this castle. Exactly how many years would be needed to investigate the true nature of all these devices and grasp the full details of all the books and sorcery apparatuses?

Like I thought, some subordinates would be nice...

He could use some humans to manage this place and gather information on his behalf.

However, finding ones that wouldn't betray him... or rather, sorcerers who would meet his demands, was a difficult task. Foll did, in fact, satisfy those conditions, but whether she would accept such a job was an entirely different matter.

At his wit's end over the difficulty of that problem, Zagan set forth toward the archives for the time being. And as he did, Foll called out to him.

"Zagan, what about this magic circle?" Foll said, pointing at the magic circle drawn on the ground all the while. It was large enough that even with a long stride, it would take three or four steps to cross. Additionally, it was constructed using delicately inlaid crystals. It was fascinating to think how sorcery carried to the extreme was so beautiful.

"What about it?" Zagan tilted his head to the side, and Foll replied as if it were obvious.

"This is a dragon's magic formula."

"What the... You sure?"

"Yep."

It appeared there were circuits that were only handed down among dragons. This magic circle's structure as sorcery wasn't different from what he knew, so that must have been the difference.

He was an Archdemon who lived for a thousand years, so it isn't all that strange for him to be versed in the magic formulas of dragons. Though it wasn't a power that he could possibly understand at the mere age of eighteen.

And while Zagan was deeply moved by that new truth, Foll looked up at him with a somehow boastful look on her face.

"I properly reported it, just as you asked."

Her figure as she did so would never make one think that she was an atrocious dragon. No, instead it made Zagan naturally begin brushing her head.

“Indeed. How admirable, Foll.”

“Heh...” After squinting her eyes like it tickled, Foll ran over to Nephy.

“Nephy, Zagan praised me.”

“Good for you, Foll.”

After having her head brushed gently by Nephy as well, Foll let out a fully satisfied sigh.

Looking at her like that, Zagan felt a feeling similar to his desire to protect Nephy well up within him.

I don't want to admit it, but do I care for her as well...? He wanted to deny it at first, but now that it had come to this, he had no choice but to face the music. And while Zagan was bewildered by the change within himself, he asked Foll a question.

“Hear me, Foll. Do you know what sort of device this is?”

“It probably... conceals a door or something.”

That meant it was a seal which made use of a dragon's magic formula.

And beyond this... is the main part of the castle, huh? With that, it was no wonder that he was unable to find any significant knowledge last time.

“Can you open it?”

“I can try...” Foll touched the magic circle, and began investigating its structure.

And while Zagan was watching her attentively, Nephy nestled up next to him.

“What's wrong?”

“No, um...” As Zagan tilted his head to the side, in an unusual turn, Nephy was hesitating to speak while her mouth fidgeted about. And, as if she was being bashful about something, the tips of her pointy ears were dyed bright red.

After a bit, she looked at Zagan with upturned eyes as if telling him to somehow figure it out.

Am I, an Archdemon, being tested...? He never thought he would receive a trial like this from Nephy, so he was stupefied. In a daze, Zagan frantically put his head to use.

Is she... coaxing me or something? For Nephy to insist on such a thing on her own was exceedingly unusual. She wanted him to figure it out on his own somehow...

After a short while, Zagan suddenly remembered Foll's fully satisfied expression. When Zagan and Nephy praised her, the young girl made an easy to understand broad grin.

However, I also try to praise Nephy as much as I can...

Of course, it was difficult for Zagan to spout honest words of gratitude or praise. But even so, he was intent on voicing his feelings whenever possible, and he also thought that Nephy had figured that out to an extent.

Then, is it something else? He didn't think it was something far off from his exchange with Foll.

After that, Zagan remembered how Foll squinted her eyes like she was awfully comfortable.

I see... That's what it is, then!

Finally, he felt like he found the answer. And with a tense countenance, Zagan returned Nephy's gaze.

"Nephy."

"Y-Yes..."

"Don't... move, got it?"

"...Huh?"

While Zagan was making a tormented face, like he had come across an enemy that he had no hope of defeating, Nephy looked back at him with her eyes wide open.

Eventually, Zagan timidly stretched his hand out to Nephy's face, Nephy let out a gulp, and he touched her soft hair.

Nephy was coaxing him for something that she couldn't put into words. And the answer that Zagan arrived at was— To pet Nephy's head!

And sure enough, Nephy squinted her eyes comfortably, letting out a sigh of relief as she did.

I've also had my head stroked before, haven't I?

Zagan also had his head gently brushed back when he used Nephy's lap as a pillow. Among all his experiences in life, it was a moment of utmost happiness. And yet, Zagan had never reciprocated the act. Watching Foll get her head gently brushed right before her eyes must have made Nephy feel jealous.

As the tips of Nephy's ears quivered in satisfaction, she suddenly leaned against Zagan's body.

You know, this kind of thing... isn't bad at all.

Those were his true, honest thoughts in the moment.

He also realized that Nephy had never shown such emotions when it was just the two of them. Seemed some sort of desire was born within Nephy after Foll joined their household.

It was a dramatic change compared to how she had given up on life when they first met.

"..." And as Zagan's cheeks loosened up from that realization, he noticed Foll was staring at him intently, which made them quickly separate from each other.

“Wh-What is it, Foll?”

“It’s open...”

There was now a gaping wide opening that led to a staircase further down in front of the little girl.

“Mm, good work!” Zagan said, as he descended down the staircase with quick steps.



An enormous archive came into sight as they reached the bottom of the staircase. The ceiling pierced through all the way to the floor above, and bookshelves and such were lined up as high as one could see.

On a rough estimate, there were likely tens of thousands of books. It would surely take more than a decade to read through all of them. And among the musty tomes, there were many which appeared quite old, and even some which looked handmade.

They were the books Marchosias had spent a thousand years collecting.

After taking it all in, Zagan shifted his focus over to Foll.

“Well done, Foll. It seems this is the genuine article.”

If they searched around, then there may have been other secret passages, but a dragon’s magic formula was used as a seal in the entrance hall. Plus, it was placed in a manner that stood out. Its frequency of use was high, and yet the probability that it was an extremely important place was also high.

After running such thoughts through his head, Zagan turned around to face Nephy and Foll.

“Collect absolutely every book that describes anything related to demons or the Sigil of the Archdemon.”

Even if it didn’t cut to the core of the matter, as long as he gathered circuits related to them, he would eventually be able to see the whole picture. After all, a sorcerer could always reach the heart of a matter through proper research.

Nephy then lifted the hem of her skirt and bent down at the waist.

“Certainly, as you will.” Zagan had taught her everything necessary when they last visited. Since this was the second time, she had grown accustomed to evaluating a book based on the title and the table of contents. And next to her, Foll looked up at Zagan as if she was anticipating something.

“...Well, I don’t mind if you bring back any books you find that you have your sights on, either.”

“Roger!” After Foll said that and nodded, each of them walked off in separate directions.

For the time being, Zagan started by investigating the shelves

which were consolidated together.

With an archive of this scale, it seems possible that there'll be even more hidden staircases or the like...

For example, manipulating a book on a shelf could reveal a hidden area. That sort of setup was seen quite often in a sorcerer's hideout.

Marchosias' archive was vast under normal circumstances, so Zagan wasn't sure where to even begin.

As he walked along the shelves while skimming over the titles on the spines, he happened across Foll. It seemed she was searching the same bookshelf from the other side.

Looking up at Zagan's face, Foll tilted her head to the side ever so slightly.

"Zagan, you seem happy."

"Is it that obvious?"

"It is."

Zagan touched his own face as he heard her words. He didn't know if he was really smiling or not, but her prodding made him realize he might've been in a good mood.

"Well, I mean, I have so many books at my disposal now. Why wouldn't I be happy?"

"I can understand that." Unexpectedly, Foll agreed with him.

"I don't hate... reading books."

"I see..." Zagan tried imagining the sight of this little girl carrying a heavy book as she tottered about. He wasn't Manuela, but his face reflexively loosened up at the thought. And in response to that, Foll once more questioned him in a curious tone.

"Zagan, can you read the hearts of others?"

"Huh...? Who knows... I wonder..." Without understanding the meaning of her question, he replied as if giving her the slip, and conversely, Foll shifted her gaze over to him in earnest.

"Zagan, you could tell what Nephy wanted... without either of you speaking about it." She was likely talking about when Zagan pet Nephy's head earlier. However, having that deliberately said to him made Zagan want to die of embarrassment. And so, he then scratched the tip of his nose, as if glossing to distract himself.

"Nephy always seems to know my every want and need. If I didn't understand her at least a little, then I would lose face." Even though he had hurt her and thrown her out once, Nephy sensed his true feelings and decided to return to his side. That was why he wanted to answer her in kind.

And after he made his intentions clear, Foll cast her eyes down in a somewhat lonely manner.

"I'm just a little... jealous."

Hearing that, Zagan knit his brows suspiciously.

“Why are you speaking like it’s someone else’s problem?”

“Uh, what...?”

“I don’t know how long dragons live, but Marchosias survived a thousand years.”

Foll stared back at Zagan blankly, as if she didn’t understand his words. And so, he said the following while averting his gaze.

“With a thousand years, we can at least reach the point where we sense such things without exchanging words, right?” Of course, he also had Nephy by his side, so he was in a rush to gather knowledge in order to allow her to live as many of those years as freely as possible.

In response to that, Foll made a face like she couldn’t believe his words.

“You’ll... stay... with me...?”

“I don’t plan on meddling in your choices, so that depends on you.”

“I’ll stay here,” Foll replied, then clung to Zagan’s arm.

This sort of affection... isn’t in my nature, though... Still, he begrudgingly brushed Foll’s head.

That carried on for a while until Zagan realized he couldn’t just stay like that forever. And as he continued to search through the archive with Foll stuck to his arm, she suddenly raised her face.

“That’s...?” She pulled out a single book from the shelf as she uttered that lone word. And her face immediately turned sharp and aggressive.

The title was ‘The Twelve Sacred Swords.’ The Sacred Swords were the natural enemies of sorcerers. It seemed to be a book that compiled information on them, but... As Foll began flipping through the pages of the book, Zagan raised his voice with an ‘Ah.’

“Hand that over for a bit.”

“Grrr...” Though Foll groaned and glared at him, he had no leisure to worry about such matters.

Reproductions of the letters carved into the Sacred Swords covered the pages. And as he gazed at them, Zagan lowered his eyes to his right hand.

I was right! Comparing it by eye, the Sigil of the Archdemon held similar characteristics to the crests etched onto the Sacred Swords.

It wasn’t enough to say they resembled each other. However, if they were letters, then there were many common portions to them. Basically, it seemed they had the same cultural origin.

Since the similarities were so minor, it didn’t even strike a chord back when he happened across Chastille again. Though there was also the fact that she wasn’t carrying her Sacred Sword earlier.

However, when comparing it to a record like this, he was

confident in his observation.

In other words, if I investigate the Sacred Swords, then I'll also find out more about the Sigil of the Archdemon.

If they were crests from the same system, then knowing about one would allow him to understand the other.

As he concluded his hypotheses, Zagan snapped the book shut and handed it back to Foll.

“Well done, Foll. Now, go gather any and all books related to the Sacred Swords. I'll also look around.”

“Uh, okay...!” Foll was likely interested in Sacred Swords because of her disdain for Angelic Knights. But still, her voice was colored by anticipation and delight.

After passing that order over to Nephy, the three went around searching and were able to discover several tomes related to the Sacred Swords.

Chapter III: Getting Involved with Angelic Knight Business Is a Huge Pain!

“It is an honor to make your acquaintance, Archangel Raphael Hyurandell. I am Chastille Lillqvist.”

The church’s Kianoides branch cathedral.

While Zagan and the others were exploring Archdemon Palace, Chastille bowed her head as she presented herself.

With her authority as an Angelic Knight frozen, Chastille was not permitted to carry her Sacred Sword or don her Anointed Armor. After bumping into Zagan and the others, she changed into a ceremonial dress, so she was now nothing more than an ordinary human girl. Behind her, her three subordinates were standing in a row just like they always did.

And the Angelic Knight in front of her was a man with a terrifying air of intimidation that made it apparent he was not yet past his prime.

What caught one’s eye immediately was the deep scar running across his face from his brow to cheek. His graying blonde hair was cut short, and his deep blue eyes were lit with a sharp light that made it feel like his gaze alone could kill. And then, there was his Anointed Armor that looked tight around his large build. With his thick jawbone and finely chiseled nose, he had a fiendish look that would make faint of heart to gasp upon seeing him.

And on his back, he was carrying a greatsword. A Sacred Sword.

All twelve Sacred Swords had the same shape. In other words, it should have been the same as the Sacred Sword which was bestowed to Chastille, but on him it looked like it could be used one-handed.

Priding himself on holding the record for subjugating the most sorcerers in history at 499, he was the symbol of the church’s power. Archangel Raphael.

The three Angelic Knights in waiting behind Chastille could do nothing but stiffly look up at him.

However, there were no other Angelic Knights in sight around Raphael.

An Archangel... came here without a single escort...? Since they were the greatest fighting force of the church, the Archangels had to be

protected. Chastille and the other Archangels would fight as the vanguard during the subjugation of sorcerers, but they always had subordinates who protected them in tow. And yet, the only one to come here was Raphael.

It was certain that he was powerful, but she still thought that his conduct was quite rash.

After Raphael gazed at Chastille from the tips of her toes to the top of her head, he let out a smile that looked like a fissure running across a rock.

“So you’re the damn ‘Maiden of the Sacred Sword’ I’ve heard all about in reports, huh? It’s been said that you’re in the middle of penitence for going against the orders of the church, but contrary to my expectations, you’re making quite the good expression there.”

Going against the orders of the church... It seemed the fact that she covered for Zagan was not passed along to others. This was likely the consideration of Cardinal Clavwell.

“Those words are more than I deserve,” Chastille quietly replied, and Raphael let out a snort with a ‘hmp.’

“How many of those damn sorcerers have you cut down so far?”

Chastille bit down on her lip as if asking him ‘Really, that’s what you ask first?’

“...I do not believe that it is a number worth boasting about.”

“Oh...?” Raphael narrowed his eyes in an overbearing manner.



(L-Lady Ch-Chastille, please mind the way you're speaking!)

(As diminutive as we are, even using our lives as a shield won't be enough to protect you!)

(Gaaah, how unsightly. Did we not swear among us that we would throw our lives away for Lady Chastille's sake!?)

The three knights were making a clamor in hushed voices, but as Raphael glanced over to them, they violently trembled and shut their mouths.

Did that ruin his mood? This was the Angelic Knight who had killed the most sorcerers in the world. Chastille did not think that he would feel any hesitation in killing an apostate ally given his body count. Honestly, she had made her resolution to have her head separated from her body today.

Thinking back on it, the reason she was walking around town when she had to meet this man may have been because she wanted to talk with someone one last time.

Running across Zagan and Nephy there... was far too good of a coincidence, though.

...Well, she did end up in shock and tears at the fact that he didn't even remember.

And yet, Raphael took on a defiant attitude and let out a hearty laugh as if amusing himself with Chastille.

"Haahaahaa! It has been a long time since someone let their mouth run in front of me. It may, in fact, be a first for a woman as well. How pleasant. You may boast of that in hell."

With a crack, the air froze over.

Like I thought, it's come to this... Tch! With a sword used only for show hanging at her waist, Chastille was basically unarmed. To Raphael, it wouldn't change the fact that he could crush her underfoot like an insect.

"U-UWAAAH, please run away, Lady Chastille!" The three Angelic Knights sprang forth. However, they were far too powerless to take on this giant of a man. And at that exact moment...

"Lord Raphael, what exactly are you doing to my Angelic Knights, pray tell?" The one who let out a roar at the giant of a knight was an elderly cardinal.

Rough steps came rushing over from deeper within the cathedral where the cardinal's office was.

"Hmph. Clavwell, is it? I have no business with a man who can't think of anything that isn't written upon paper."

"Even if you have no business with me, I have a sworn duty to protect the Angelic Knights under my care. Know that you shall not be permitted to do as you please here."

Hearing such reliable words made Chastille think tears were about to spill from her eyes.

As for Raphael, he stared back at the cardinal without showing any hint of respect.

“More importantly, bastard... it seems you revoked this one’s access to her Sacred Sword?”

“It was not revoked, but is merely being kept in custody temporarily.”

“Isn’t that the same thing? Where is it?”

And in response to that, Clavwell returned an unconvinced gaze.

“...And what do you intend to do upon learning its location?”

“You know full well. A sword only has value when it is wielded. Is there any meaning to stowing it in a sheath and using it as a gaudy decoration?”

Clavwell then questioned him in a quiet tone, as if searching for the significance of his words.

“Are you, by any chance, requesting that I return it to Chastille?”

“That does not even need to be said. The Sacred Sword chooses its wielder of its own will. As long as the wielder is alive, no other may wield it,” Raphael paused there for a moment, then glanced over to Chastille and continued, “Though, that only applies as long as Chastille still draws breath. She would lose custody of it if the life was choked out of her, for example,” he expanded on his point, making a gruesome smile as if saying that he would happily take on such a role as he did.

“What a repulsive response!” Clavwell exclaimed, then stepped back in shock. And, as Clavwell mimed the sign of the cross in front of his chest and returned a glare at him, Raphael spoke out without any signs of timidity.

“What are you so frightened of? Am I not simply stating facts? In the first place, you bastards have no right to interject into how a wielder of a Sacred Sword brandishes their blade. All you need do is think about how to deal with the damn aftermath,” he claimed. The way he was speaking made it sound like as long as one was acknowledged by a Sacred Sword, then even a massacre would be permitted.

This is... the most dreadful Archangel...

Scolding the weak portions of herself that wanted to falter, Chastille forced her way out in front of Raphael.

“You have gone too far, Lord Raphael. If we were to wield our swords only to fulfill our base desires, then that in itself would be heresy!” Chastille roared, her hands trembling in fear all the while. And as she gripped them tightly, she glared at Raphael.

“Oh, so you would speak sharply at me not just once, but even

twice, huh?" Raphael muttered like he was enjoying himself, then shifted his focus over to the cardinal.

"In any case, is this fine, Clavwell? One of those damn Angelic Knights that you should be protecting is on the verge of losing her life here."

"Ugh..."

Clavwell knew there was a distinct possibility that many could cut down Chastille right where she stood, so he could do nothing but let out a groan.

But why is he trying to make me take up the Sacred Sword? If his goal was just an execution, then it would have been fine to just cut her down immediately. He already had more than enough just cause to do so, after all.

Then, is he just trying to make sport of me resisting? She didn't want to think that such a man was chosen by a Sacred Sword, but she couldn't think of anything else.

"...Understood. Chastille, follow me," Clavwell said. And, as if he was beaten down by Raphael's persistence, he invited Chastille into the depths of the cathedral.

On the other side of the door was a red carpet laid across the floor, and several doors were lined up leading to the offices of the cardinal and the Angelic Knights. At the very end was a gate with busts modeled after angels protecting it on each side, along with two Angelic Knights serving as guards.

As one would expect, Raphael and the three Angelic Knights did not follow them. And after verifying that, Cardinal Clavwell whispered to Chastille.

"Whether or not it is correct to return this to you at present is something that even I do not know. By some chance, this may just give that man a pretext to kill you, even."

"...I am fully aware," Chastille claimed. She didn't know what Raphael's true motives were, but it likely wouldn't end up in a situation where Chastille couldn't even wield a sword, at the very least.

Making Clavwell return her Sacred Sword seemed more like a move designed to protect her, rather than an attempt to make an example to others.

As they eventually arrived at the angel's gate, the Angelic Knights who served as gatekeepers blocked their path.

"Your Eminence Clavwell, what business do you have here?"

"The time has come to return the Sacred Sword to Chastille. Please open the path."

The two gatekeepers exchanged glances, but immediately moved off to the sides. The cardinal was the chief executive of the church

they were in, so they could do naught to obstruct his path.

And, as he proceeded onward, the two gatekeepers stood before Chastille.

“As for you, please wait here.”

By all rights, it was a disrespectful attitude toward her, but Chastille obediently waited where she was. And before long, Clavwell returned with her sword in hand.

“I shall have faith that you will cut through any trials with your own two hands,” he said, then placed the Sacred Sword in Chastille’s hands.



Evening. A bar in Kianoides.

“Hyahyahyahyahya! You adopted a kid, seriously?” The one letting out a vulgar laugh was Zagan’s undesirable friend, Barbatos.

After he finished procuring new books from Archdemon Palace, Zagan was called out by his undesirable friend and returned to town on his own right after arriving home.

Nephy and Foll should be finishing up dinner right around now, right...?

Since he was called out to a bar, he told Nephy that he wouldn’t need dinner. And now, Zagan was questioning whether there was any meaning in coming here when he had to miss out on his time with them. However, while he was asking himself that, Barbatos’ stupid laugh continued to echo.

As one would expect, Zagan responded in a sharp tone.

“...Why do you even know that?”

“Gerageragera. You know, Zagan, why don’t you try speaking after looking at your own fucking face in a mirror? If people heard that an evil looking ass like you was walking about with an innocent looking brat, then it would turn into an uproar over a kidnapping, right!?”

Zagan didn’t know how widely the rumors had spread, but it seemed that him walking around with Foll had become the talk of the town.

Well, the number of people who would mess with Foll should decrease in proportion to that, at least...

There were no humans out there who would dare incur his displeasure while knowing his name. If there were any, then at most it would just be the Angelic Knights of the church, but even they were not foolish enough to challenge him without the means to do so.

It was more than enough that word was spreading around that Foll was under his patronage. And it seemed Barbatos had summoned Zagan to verify the truth behind those rumors.

“...Can I go back now?”

“Oh, come on, don’t be so damn cold. Didn’t I just let you drink all that quality booze? At least share some gossip on the side. Can’t hurt, right?”

It seemed that he was already completely drunk before Zagan even came over. And as his unhealthy looking face turned redder from the liquor, Barbatos wrapped his arm around Zagan in good humor.

Having said that, the alcohol really was delicious. It was the first time Zagan tasted a spirit poured atop a lump of ice, and the mild sweetness mixed into the feeling of his throat burning was so pleasant that it made him unintentionally let out a sigh.

Would Nephthys drink this kind of thing? If he was going to drink some anyway, then rather than this irritating man, he would prefer to share it with that lovely girl. And he now wanted to bring a bottle back with him as a present.

As he came to his sense, Zagan forced back Barbatos, who had his arm around him in an overly familiar fashion.

“...You’re filthy. Also, if it’s liquor, then just bring it to the castle. I’m busy looking after my disciple.”

“Haaa, I bet you just wanna get all fucking lovey-dovey with that elven slave of yours.”

“I-I’m not doing anything like that, you hear!?”

“The hell?” Barbatos said, picking his nose and rolling his eyes at Zagan as he did.

Can I just... slug this guy and throw him away? Without paying any mind at all to that cold gaze being returned to him, Barbatos began slapping Zagan’s shoulder repeatedly.

“So, just what is that rumored brat, exactly? It’s not your damn hobby to use sacrifices, right? Then is she a pet? You’re not gonna tell me she’s another goddamn disciple, are you?”

“...Look, she’s someone you’re familiar with, you know?”

“What? So she’s a sorcerer? She is a woman, right?” Barbatos asked, then folded his arms and thought deeply on the matter.

“If it’s a female sorcerer, then around here it would be Enchantress Gremory? But everyone knows she’s a severe man hater. Plus, she ain’t a kid. But other than that one...”

Watching Barbatos groan over the situation made Zagan feel secretly relieved.

If this guy hasn’t noticed, then the fact that Foll’s a dragon hasn’t been leaked, huh?

It was likely only a matter of time before others realized Foll was a dragon. Seeing her sorcery... or rather, her partial transformation into a dragon, would make it clear that she was Valefor.

It was an inevitable outcome, but it was still too early for that.

After all, Zagan still had enemies.

Zagan's name, as an Archdemon, was already well known, and those who would find that unacceptable and attack him were all gone. Just as he planned, both sorcerers and Angelic Knights should have known that it was not worth scheming against him.

Even so, it wasn't perfect. There were certainly still sorcerers out there waiting for the brand new Archdemon to trip up and make use of that opening. Sorcerers who possessed sufficient power to do so did exist. And so, it would still take a little more time to make them give up as well.

Counterbalancing their lives on a scale, there was the name, legacy, and mana of the 'Archdemon,' after all.

That's why... I may still need one more foil.

Zagan needed something that would strike fear into the hearts of all other sorcerers. With Nephy, and now Foll, there were two things he had to protect no matter what.

And while he was thinking of such things, Barbatos, who was simply groaning thus far, suddenly let out an 'Ah.'

"Oh yeah, Valefor!"

Zagan's body stiffened up with a start.

This guy... figured out Foll's identity? And then, feigning composure, Zagan tilted his head to the side.

"What are you talking about?"

"No, a little while ago, Valefor should have launched an attack on your place, right? That big guy with the mask and armor."

"...Ah. Yeah, he did, now that you mention it."

After getting accustomed to Foll as she was now, Zagan completely forgot that she and the Valefor who attacked him were one and the same.

"What about it?"

As Zagan tilted his head to the side, Barbatos made a disconcerted face.

"So it's not even worth remembering? There's a rumor that he's missing, but what happened in the end? Did you finish him off?"

"Who knows? How I finish off intruders is something you know full well, right?"

And while Zagan replied as if dodging the question, Barbatos looked up at the ceiling.

"Man, what a waste. There's a rumor floating around that he's actually a dragon. His corpse would've made for some good catalysts, you hear?"

Precisely because such people existed, Foll's identity had to be kept secret. Upon hearing his words, Zagan simply nodded as if he had no interest in them at all.

“Oh, now that you mention it, I think I’ve heard that before.”

“What’s that? You knew and *still* threw him out somewhere? Let me ask just in case, but is he dead?”

“If he’s lucky, shouldn’t he be alive?” Zagan replied in as much of a cool expression as he could muster, and Barbatos clicked his tongue as he backed off.

Eventually, after throwing back another mug of beer, Barbatos responded.

“So it’s just as always? Well, whatever. Forget Valefor, let’s talk about that brat you’re dragging along. Who is it?”

This guy isn’t saying this crap while knowing already, right...? Since the correct answer had been guessed already, Zagan shrugged his shoulders while enduring his impulse to make a sullen face.

“...Who knows? Just think of her as an adopted child or something.”

“Gehyahyahyahyahaa! An adopted kid... Adopted...
Buhyahyahahaha!”

... This guy’s hopeless.

And just as Zagan was seriously thinking of slugging his undesirable friend, who was laughing to the point where there were tears in his eyes... Barbatos made a grave expression.

“Well, let’s cut the jokes here, shall we?”

“...So you’ve finally come to the real issue at hand, then?”

Even this man didn’t have enough free time to just call out Zagan because he wanted to gossip.

“It seems a troublesome guy arrived at the church. I thought I’d give you a heads-up.”

“A troublesome guy?”

“A wielder of a Sacred Sword. It’s not like that girl from last time, got it? This one’s far more dangerous.”

It seemed an Archangel other than Chastille had arrived. The thought made Zagan let out a deep breath with a ‘Hooo.’

“For them to move the Sacred Swords... The church is coming out in force, huh? Are they thinking of striking down the brand new Archdemon or what?”

The discord between the church and sorcerers spanned a thousand years. Of course, within that long history, collisions between Archdemons and Archangels happened many times.

However, though there were records of Archangels repelling Archdemons, there were no records of any defeating one.

That was why, though the Archangels were able to deter Archdemons, they were unable to kill them. That was even a common understanding between the sorcerers and the church. It was only natural for the church to think of overturning that fact, however.

Barbatos then made a troubled expression.

"I wonder... This new Archangel who came over is quite the odd one. At any rate, he's the monster with the highest kill count of sorcerers in history."

"...He's not a gentle one, I see."

"Damn straight. The number of sorcerers he's killed is 499, and I don't know what's got him so ticked off, but there are calculations out there that say he kills a sorcerer every three days. And so, you've been chosen as celebratory number 500!"

Hearing that extraordinary number made Zagan knit his brows. After all, if it was a number published by someone from the church, then it was likely somewhat exaggerated, but Barbatos wasn't the type of man to speak of such nonsense.

Zagan then hung his head down in thought.

"How strange. Even if he's a wielder of a Sacred Sword, could he really kill 500 sorcerers on his own?"

Among sorcerers, the difference between those who only held the bare minimum amount of power and Archdemon candidates was like the difference between heaven and earth.

If an Archdemon candidate possessed 10000 circuits, then the circuits of a novice sorcerer would at most be a mere 100. Even if one were to kill 100 novices, an Archdemon candidate could easily defeat them if challenged. But if there were a total of 499 people, then he'd surely faced more than just one or two Archdemon candidates.

Taking that further, even among Archdemon candidates, someone like Barbatos would hold more than 20000 circuits. When it came to normal skill as a sorcerer, the hopeless man before Zagan's eyes was far better than him.

It wasn't like Chastille revealed her entire hand when she faced Barbatos the other day, but even so, if she fought against an Archdemon candidate he didn't think she would get off lightly.

Does he have an ace up his sleeve other than the Sacred Sword? And while Zagan was perplexed by that thought, Barbatos set aside his mug and formed a smile.

"About that, it's said that he killed a dragon and ate it."

"...Huh?" Zagan said, puzzled, and almost reflexively shot out of his seat.

"Is that... true?"

"Yeah. The church doesn't recognize the predation of dragons, after all. It's unofficial information, but it seems that it's really true that he cut down a dragon. If he gained the power of a dragon, then it ain't all that impossible for him to kill so many sorcerers, right?"

Shit, so that's it... Zagan cursed bitterly in his mind.

"What's strange... about a sorcerer hating Angelic Knights?" Foll

had some sort of grudge against Angelic Knights. Also, from the moment he met her, she desired an unnatural amount of power despite being a sorcerer and a dragon. And then there was a dragon killing Angelic Knight.

It wasn't like it was completely certain. But even so, hoping for the good fortune that these facts were completely unrelated was quite unreasonable.

After that, Zagan took a glance at and scowled toward Barbatos.

"You're being awfully generous with your information today..."

"Well, think of it as an apology for last time. Or something like a tribute to you, even. Rather than make an enemy of you, I'll be able to sip at sweeter nectar by going along on your wild ride."

"...You sure can talk."

Acting disconcerted by that, Zagan then poured some spirit into his glass.

"I'm quite skilled, you know? I doubt this is all too bad an offer."

"If you were such an admirable person, then I may even trust you a little... So, what do you want?" Zagan knocked back the spirit and asked him that, but Barbatos simply let out a laugh with a 'Hehehe.'

"The Eldest's legacy, could you try leaving its management to me? Anyhow, he's a sorcerer who lived for a thousand years. Even if we simply call it a legacy, it shouldn't be just some ordinary amount. It's too much for you to manage all on your own, right?"

Having Barbatos hit the bull's eye in an unpleasant spot made Zagan unable to hide his sullen face. However, he didn't hesitate at all in answering.

"Rejected."

"The hell was that!?"

"...You'd just go and hide anything that's inconvenient for me to see."

"Isn't that obvious? What's wrong with that?" Barbatos stared back at Zagan in wonder, as if there was no need to say such a thing after all this time.

Why is it that he can be so stupid despite knowing so much...? On the contrary, it was Zagan who came to a worrisome understanding.

"...Haaa. I'll split a few writings on sorcery from the legacy with you. Just keep yourself happy with that."

"Well, I guess that's good enough. Man, having a lavish friend really is the best," Barbatos said, then slammed his mug into Zagan's glass and made a toast all on his own.

After that, the atmosphere in the shop froze over. The door to the bar opened, and a certain guest came in. Since Barbatos had his back to the door, he didn't realize this and continued to talk in high spirits.

"But I'll be the one to decide which I'll be taking, got it? If you

hand me some shitty writing on sorcery just ‘cause it’s from the Eldest’s legacy, then I won’t even look at it!”

“...By the way, Barbatos.”

“What?”

Lifting up his glass of spirit, Zagan questioned Barbatos while gazing at the customer who came in through the glass.

“That Angelic Knight you talked about just now, what does he look like?”

“Ah, let’s see... I hear he’s a huge man that you wouldn’t think is an old fart. Also, he’s got a huge scar across his face. Heard he got it from the dragon he killed.”

“Really, now...?” While looking at the customer who entered the bar, Zagan let out an agreeable response. And then, taking one more sip of his drink, he made an expression like it was bothersome as he asked Barbatos one more question.

“So about that scar, does it cut across deeply from his left cheek to his right brow?”

“Huh? Well, yeah, I *did* hear it looked something like that. You sure know a lot about him, huh?”

“It’s a complete coincidence, but I’ve seen a man with very similar features.”

“Wow man, I’m surprised you got out alive. He’s a guy who seems to only have killing sorcerers on his mind, you know? If he spotted you, then he’d probably come slashing in right away.”

Zagan continued to gaze behind Barbatos, who was letting out his ‘geragera’ laugh again.

“It seems... that part comes next.”

“Huh...?” At that, Barbatos finally seemed to notice Zagan’s gaze. And as he looked over his shoulder, his face turned completely pale.

Because standing there... was a large man with a scarred face carrying a Sacred Sword.



“Raphael Hyurandell...!” Knocking down his chair, Barbatos shot up. And without sparing him a single glance, the scar-faced Angelic Knight looked straight at Zagan.

Has he come to take my head all of a sudden? The power of the Sacred Sword was troublesome, but it was conceited to think a single one on its own could strike down an Archdemon. If he was such a fool, then he would not have lived so long.

As Zagan knit his brows from being unable to read the Angelic Knight’s aim, Barbatos raised a trembling voice.

“Y-You son of a bitch, why are you here!?”

The scar-faced Angelic Knight then finally shifted his attention

over to Barbatos. And as he did, a smile formed on his brusque face that looked like a rocky surface. From that fiendish expression, the unlucky bar owner's daughter, who was behind Barbatos, let out a scream to the point of fainting.

Even though he hadn't looked directly at her, his sight had such power behind it. And facing that smile, which already made one feel a physical pressure, Barbatos resolved himself as he roared.

"U-UOOOOOOH, I'll fucking do it!" The light of mana lit up in both of Barbatos' hands, and the scar-faced Angelic Knight also put his hand on the hilt of the Sacred Sword at his back.

"Stop that, Barbatos," Zagan said as he placed his glass on the table with a clunk. And the moment he did, the mana pouring out of Barbatos' hands vanished. It wasn't like he actually stopped or anything, though. No, Zagan had 'eaten' it.

After that, Zagan lightly waved his finger in the air, and the chair Barbatos knocked over returned to its original position.

"Well, take a seat. The liquor will lose its taste."

"The hell are you taking it so fucking easy for!? You planning on just quietly getting killed?"

In response to Barbatos howling as if his fear had been overturned by anger, Zagan shook his head like it was all just too bothersome.

"That guy there... doesn't really seem to want to fight, you know?"

"The fuck? He's got his hand right on his sword, don't he!?"

"Isn't that because you picked a fight?"

After Barbatos began invoking sorcery, the scar-faced Angelic Knight gripped his sword. And Zagan did not overlook that fact.

Besides, I can't sense any bloodthirst or hostility, either.

Both Nephy and Foll didn't really specialize at expressing emotion. No, in Foll's case, rather than not expressing emotion, she simply didn't speak enough. That was why this method of sensing intent was known to him. In any case, there were many things that couldn't be known just by looking at their faces.

That was why, when it came to what they were thinking, and what they wanted him to do, Zagan had ended up developing a habit of looking at the subtleties of emotion by observing them and taking in such things.

The scar-faced Angelic Knight then made a smile that looked like it split the earth.

"The Archdemon this time around... is quite the composed one, I see."

"An Archdemon won't make a racket over every little thing."

Although, sensing no hostility from such dreadfulness was quite strange in itself, and Zagan was unable to hide his bewilderment.

Eventually, Zagan looked at the chair he raised with sorcery. It seemed that in such a situation, Barbatos had no intention to get back to drinking, and even after the Angelic Knight let go of his sword, Barbatos would not take his seat.

“It appears we have an empty seat. Will you join us?”

“Hooo... What an amusing man.”

Straining his scarred face fiendishly, the Angelic Knight sat down in the seat across from Zagan. Barbatos created some space as if to avoid him.

Rather, you should be the one talking here. I don't have anything to talk about with this stone-faced man, you know? Zagan ended up telling the man to take a seat by just kind of going with the flow, but he didn't really have any sort of goal in mind.

Or rather, since his time with Nephy was completely lost, he only wanted to at least enjoy some liquor. But despite that, Barbatos was backing off as if saying that he wanted to be excused from getting involved with any of it. On the contrary...

“Shit, why does a sorcerer like me have go through this kinda crap?”

“Mr. S-Sorcerer, could you maybe save my daughter?”

“Like I know. Healing sorcery is outside my field of expertise, but I'll at least do what I can.”

“Oooh... I should've expected as much from Master Zagan's attendant.”

“I'm not a damn attendant!” While cursing at the man who seemed to be the owner of the bar, he began nursing the girl who had fainted. Since she'd only lost consciousness, Zagan didn't think there was any need to go as far as to use sorcery, though.

I also wanna go over there, but... The woman Zagan had set his heart on was none other than Nephy, but when it came to deciding between this stone-faced man and the owner's daughter, it didn't even need to be said which he'd rather be stuck with.

Having said that, nothing would be accomplished by just constantly glaring at Barbatos. And so, Zagan finally turned about to face the Angelic Knight.

“So, what do you want with me, dragon killer?”

“It's Raphael,” he replied, pouring some spirit into a glass as he did. His hand was enormous to the point where the bottle looked like a miniature to him.

“I've heard that my fellows owe you much, so I came to take a look at your face.”

He was likely talking about Chastille, which made Zagan shrug his shoulders like it was no big deal.

“My face is nothing compared to yours, is it?”

“Fuhaha, even you’ve got quite the evil face, just as those damn rumors said, don’t you?”

Zagan was self-conscious about his villainous features, so he felt a little down. Still, as if glossing that over, he knocked back his glass.



“I’ve heard that it’s your hobby to kill sorcerers, so is it alright to put it off for today? There are two sorcerers here before your very eyes.”

The girl seemed mostly fine now, so Zagan asked Raphael that question to prevent his undesirable friend’s quick exit. Barbatos, who was about to place his hand on the door, looked back at him with a sullen expression.

After Raphael finished the spirit in his glass in a single swig, he let out a hearty laugh.

“Worthless. All I did was shake off the sparks that happened to fall before me, but those around me saw fit to kick up a big fuss.”

Zagan then tilted his head to the side curiously.

Somehow, he’s different from what Barbatos was saying. He was a homicidal maniac who had killed nearly 500 sorcerers, or so the rumors claimed. Due to that, Zagan was prepared to have him come slashing in gleefully, but unexpectedly, they were sharing an ordinary conversation.

Perhaps he had come to weigh out Zagan’s capabilities? And as Zagan hit upon that notion and once more took a sip from his glass, Raphael was the one to open his mouth to speak.

“It seems you had a quarrel with Chastille, right? Why didn’t you kill her?”

Sensing a sort of discomfort in the Angelic Knight’s words, Zagan knit his brows.

“You’re saying that as if she didn’t have any chance of winning, huh?”

Chastille may not have been a good match for him, but even so, their pride as wielders of Sacred Swords should not have allowed them to speak like they couldn’t win against a sorcerer. Zagan at the time wasn’t yet an Archdemon, either.

However, Raphael simply let out a snort with a ‘hmp’ in response.

“Then let me ask you in return, was she strong enough to rival a bastard like you?”

“Who knows... However, she was the strongest among the humans I’ve faced so far. I’m sure of that, at least.”

Sure, even Barbatos had managed to capture her, but Zagan had also yet to see Chastille seriously swing her sword. Zagan had faced off against both of them before, so he found it doubtful that Barbatos would win if they both fought head-on.

After being given that reply, Raphael narrowed his eyes like a blade.

“I see. Then that means she has become sufficient enough a threat

to the church, does it?"

"Huh...? I don't see where you're going with that... What are you talking about?"

It sounded to Zagan like he was saying that Chastille was an enemy of the church. And hearing Zagan's confusion made Raphael's stone-like face twist into the shape of a smile once more.

"She raised an objection to the subjugation of an Archdemon. That is more than enough reason for the church to decide on her execution. They even went as far as revoking her Sacred Sword for a spell... A foolish decision, I must say. As long as the wielder of a Sacred Sword is left alive, the next Angelic Knight won't be able to succeed them."

Hearing that made Zagan open his eyes wide.

That girl is too damn honest! It would have been fine if she just arbitrarily matched what those around her were doing, and yet, it seemed she revolted in a foolishly brazen manner. Not only that, she covered for Zagan.

With his head in his hands, Zagan let out a deep sigh.

"...I did think she didn't seem the type to live a long life."

"Yeah, seriously. I even went and warned her, but I guess she just didn't listen."

Raphael spoke like he somehow pitied her. And in response, Zagan opened his eyes wide as an unexpected thought ran through his mind.

Does this guy plan on killing Chastille? If it was said that his hobby was killing sorcerers, then it only stood to reason that he would also gladly execute Angelic Knights who covered for sorcerers.

Zagan felt like he finally understood the reason why he sensed no bloodthirst from him at all.

So he came here to verify the connection between me and Chastille, then? In other words, he was looking for justification to kill Chastille.

The one connected to her wasn't Zagan, but Nephy. However, it wouldn't be strange to take the statement just now as if he was.

He got me. Zagan let out a groan as he realized he'd been played like a fiddle. And at that exact moment, Raphael stood up.

"Now then, I no longer have any damn business with you. I shall take my leave."

"...Wait," Zagan muttered, well aware that his voice had grown cold.

"Do you need something?" Raphael said as he turned around, sporting a gaze that made it clear he would cut Zagan down if he made even a single wrong choice in words.

"Chastille seems to be rather well loved within this town. She has many friends here, too. There would be no small number who would grieve her death, I assure you."

Nephy and Manuela would definitely be thrown into the depths of despair. That was why Zagan informed him of that fact in an overbearing manner.

“This town is my domain. If you go too far doing whatever you please, then I’ll crush and grind you into the ground, got it?”

It didn’t matter whether she was part of the church or that she was an Angelic Knight. As long as Chastille lived in Kianoides, she was Zagan’s property. And if this man was saying that he would willfully kill her, then Zagan would crush him. Simple as that. That was what it meant to be under Zagan’s protection.

The two reasons why he didn’t do it right then and there was because there was a mountain of ‘citizens that could be used as shields’ around them, and also he was still in the middle of enjoying a drink. If the bar was destroyed, he could repair it with sorcery, but he knew it was difficult to repair people.

However, that was simply a reason for him not wanting to fight, and wasn’t a reason for him not to fight.

It’s a pain in the ass to avoid the shields while slugging him, though...

And perhaps having understood what Zagan was getting at, Raphael opened his eyes wide as if he found his actions rather unexpected.

“That doesn’t seem like a thing an Archdemon would say, now does it?”

“Precisely because I am an Archdemon, I am arrogant.”

And as he replied so haughtily, Raphael burst into a hearty laughter.

“Hahaha, as I thought, you’re exactly the type of man I was hoping you’d be. That’s exactly it. The ‘evil’ that the church must exterminate.”

What he sensed from Raphael was not bloodthirst, but exaltation.

Meaning he doesn’t think that sorcerers are even people, huh?

It was the same as hunting in his eyes. After all, when hunting beasts one harbored neither bloodthirst nor hostility. They only got excited by the kill itself.

And, as Raphael formed a smile that seemed to challenge Zagan, he left the bar.

Released from the tension, the customers in the bar all let out a sigh of relief. Eventually, while throwing a sidelong glance at Barbatos, who plunked back down into his seat, Zagan muttered something.

“...I don’t like it.”

“There’s no way a sorcerer would like anything to do with an Angelic Knight, right? Wouldn’t it be better to go and fucking kill him right now?”

Zagan let out a small sigh as he watched Barbatos whine.

“...I guess. Then go, Barbatos.”

Barbatos opened his mouth in shock as he heard those words.

“Hey, you just told me to go and die, didn’t you?”

“Not really. It’s true that I’d like you to die, but don’t misunderstand.”

“So you *do* want me dead?”

Finding his teary-eyed, undesirable friend bothersome as he watched him, Zagan shook his head.

“I told you not to misunderstand, didn’t I? I want you to go check on Chastille’s condition.”

Barbatos’ second name was Purgatory.

Purgatory referred to the plane that existed between heaven and hell, but in the same vein, it was also something akin to a valley between dimensions that had a controlling presence over the strange space given birth to by sorcery.

And his second name came from the fact that he could freely come and go from that space.

Whether it be the ability he used when he abducted Nephy and Chastille, or the power he used to easily hijack Zagan’s teleportation circle, this man was a sorcerer who excelled at teleportation and summoning. It would be a trifle for him to just hide and protect Chastille.

That’s probably why he managed to pull off something like summoning a demon, huh?

It wasn’t by a large margin, but as Zagan was now, it would be difficult to mimic Barbatos. Perhaps he could manage by borrowing the power of the Sigil of the Archdemon, but that wasn’t good enough.

And so, Zagan uttered his request, but Barbatos bluntly made a face like he didn’t want any part of it.

“What? Why should I?”

“I’ll add some extra to your tip. Whatever, just go already.”

Barbatos then made a face like he found this turn of events rather unexpected.

“Are you seriously planning on saving a damn Angelic Knight?”

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend... is something that is often said. Besides, don’t you think it’d be amusing to put a wielder of a Sacred Sword in my debt?”

“Man, I think you’re definitely gonna fucking regret this, you hear?” Even as he cursed out toward Zagan, Barbatos did not refuse his offer.

And just like that, Barbatos sank into his own shadow. He likely moved over to the Purgatory that was his namesake. And from there, he would be able to investigate Chastille’s circumstances.

Zagan, however, was left taken aback.

“...That ass just up and left without paying the bill.”

Zagan had been the one who ordered him to leave, but somehow it felt like he had just been tricked.



By the time Zagan returned to the castle, it was already about time for the next day to begin.

I wonder if Nephy and Foll are already sleeping? Nephy woke up early in the mornings. If she was still awake at this hour, then it would affect her the following day, but even so, it was a little lonely for Zagan to come back and not hear her voice.

If he wanted to just see her face, then it was fine to take a peek in her bedroom, but Nephy's room was on the top floor. If she heard the sounds of him coming up the stairs, he would end up waking her. That was why he returned to the throne room while making as little sound as he could, but...

(Welcome home, Master Zagan.) Nephy was waiting for him in front of the throne room in her nightgown.

“Nephy, you were still awake?”

As Zagan stared at her in wonder, Nephy put her finger to her lips and went ‘Shhh.’

Looking closely, he realized Nephy was sitting down with Foll sound asleep on her lap. It seemed the two of them were waiting for Zagan to come back.

(Didn't I say to go to sleep without waiting?) As Zagan said that, Nephy formed a wry smile.

(I'm only here because Foll insisted on waiting for you to return, Master Zagan.) The person in question seemed to have fallen asleep like a log partway through, though.

And seeing that, Zagan's face naturally slackened.

(She was originally an intruder who attacked me because she wanted the power of the Archdemon, though, huh?)

(And were you not the one who placed this child close at hand, Master Zagan?) While saying that, Nephy gently brushed Foll's head, which made the small child stir lightly as if it was ticklish.

Zagan then went up beside the two of them in a relaxed manner and sat down.

(Ah... Also, what did you have for dinner today?) Zagan felt like covering his face as he wondered why that was the first thing he asked upon coming back, but Nephy just quietly nodded.

(We had a simple meal of lamb soup and salad.)

(Oh, that soup, huh? How regrettable.)

(There are still some leftovers. Shall I warm some up for you?)

(Hmm... No, I'm fine for now. Foll is already asleep, after all.) After watching Foll's peaceful sleeping face, he realized he didn't feel like waking her up just to have some soup poured for him. And so, Zagan decided to warm it up and have some on his own later.

Nephy then covered her mouth as if his decision felt strange to her. The change in her expression was meager as always, but the way her ears quivered with a twitch showed that she was rather cheerful.

(After that, Foll also did her best. She carried all of the books we brought back into the archives.)

(There were quite a large number of them, right?)

(Yes. But because she wanted to quickly read them herself, she tried to have them ready for you to read right away upon your return, Master Zagan.)

Zagan tried imaging the figure of that small girl pattering about in and out of the archives for his sake. And as he did, a charmed sigh spilled from his mouth.

I wonder if... having a family feels something like this... It felt like he would forget that he was a villainous sorcerer if things kept going at that rate.

After that, Nephy pointed her azure eyes toward him.

(Master Zagan, could it be that something happened with Foll?)

(Huh? No, I don't think there was anything in particular?) Foll also wasn't good at expressing her emotions, but he didn't think he had caused her to get angry or sad.

As Zagan inclined his head to the side, Nephy affectionately gazed at Foll's sleeping face.

(Today, Foll seemed to be particularly happy. Master Zagan, you may not be self-conscious of this, but it is likely that you did something that brightened her day.)

Something that made Foll happy... Unable to think of what that was, Zagan tried to retread his earlier conversation with her. And as he kept his head tilted for a while, he remembered the moment where Foll made a strangely happy face.

(Oh, could it be that?)

(Do you have some sort of idea?)

(It wasn't really anything major, though. All I told her was that if we spent a thousand years together, then wouldn't we be able to sense what the other needs just by look at each other's faces?)

As Nephy blinked with her eyes wide open, she let out a stifled chuckle.

(If you say such a thing, then anybody would be in high spirits.)

(Why's that?) Zagan couldn't figure out the meaning behind Nephy's words as she leaned on his shoulder.

(I believe the reason Foll was so happy was because you said 'if

we spent a thousand years together.’ I mean, aren’t dragons supposed to live far longer than humans? Not only that, to say that you would understand each other...)

Having that said to him made the truth finally dawn on Zagan.

The mythical classed dragon was a race that was said to live over ten thousand years. With a human’s original lifespan, it was likely impossible to pass time together. After all, they didn’t live long enough to even last through a young dragon’s childhood. As such, it was difficult to find an existence that they could live together with during their eternal time.

Perhaps, that’s exactly why the grudge she bears for her parent dragon being killed is so deep.

It may have been a different story if it was a matured dragon who passed the age of childhood. However, to a young dragon who still needed their parents, the anguish they felt from having that stolen away should have been the same as humans, or perhaps even far greater.

I guess in the end, if I don’t finish off Raphael sooner than later, it’ll become something troublesome.

If Foll and that man were to meet, at worst, it was entirely possible that it would turn into an all-out war with the church. If that happened, it would be a huge step back in Zagan’s goal of making it so that Nephy could live under the sun.

And while he racked his brain over what to do, Nephy muttered in a somewhat lonely manner.

(It would be nice... if I could also spend that much time together with you...)

And this time, it was Zagan who stared back at her in wonder.

(What are you saying? Isn’t it obvious that you’ll be with us, Nephy?) Elves were also a race with a long lifespan, even if it wasn’t to the extent of the dragons. If one were to add on the power of sorcery, then it would likely be a trifle to live at least a thousand years.

In that sense, the one who had to put the most effort into living a long life was Zagan.

As Nephy’s azure eyes trembled at his response, she returned a large nod.

(Yes! I will accompany you anywhere you go, Master Zagan.)

This time, Zagan was taken aback, and before he knew it, his face and Nephy’s were close enough that their noses were almost touching.

Ugh... So Nephy’s eyelashes were this long, huh? Or rather, she smells good!

Thinking about it, the fact that she was wearing her nightgown showed that she just got out of the bath, which meant Zagan was

likely smelling the scent of soap. Upon realizing all that, he touched her hair, which was let down with his hand. It was still a little wet, cold, and soft.

Right around the same time, Nephy also grew conscious of the distance between them. She was now bright red from the tips of her pointy ears to the top of her cheeks.

(Nephy...) He called her name, and Nephy's eyes grew moist. As his gaze was sucked in by her pink lips, Zagan softly touched her cheek.

(Ah...) She let out that gasp like breath, which merely served to make Zagan's face grow hotter.

If it was now, then he felt like she would permit it. Yes, he was sure it was fine to touch her pure white skin, and progress onward after that.

And then, just as their lips were about to meet...

"Hey, Zagan! This is bad!" A magic circle shined in the middle of the room, and the voice of his undesirable friend who couldn't read the atmosphere rang out.

Trembling with a start, Zagan and Nephy distanced themselves from each other. And then, Barbatos' face suddenly appeared in the center of the magic circle.

"Hey, at least answer me. What are you... uh, huh?"

Zagan slowly got up and stood before Barbatos. And within his gaze, one would not be able to find even a speck of compassion.

"Come out to the surface, Barbatos. I'll turn you into minced meat."

"Why are you so pissed?"

Zagan was seriously intent on killing Barbatos, but seeing the 'other person' he was carrying within the magic circle made him stop his hand.

"Chastille?"

"Didn't you tell me to go take a look at her...?"

Yes, Barbatos was carrying the young girl who served as an Angelic Knight. Unlike when Zagan met her in the afternoon, however, she was wearing her Anointed Armor. And on her back was a Sacred Sword.

Unfortunately, her face was pale and her breathing was rough. He couldn't spot any external wounds, but she didn't look to be in good condition. In order to get a better grasp of the situation, Zagan touched Chastille neck and brow, then examined her.

Her pulse is high. And yet, her temperature is bizarrely low. From that condition, he immediately figured out the cause of the irregularity.

"Is it poison?"

"Probably. She was given something to drink and all."

Zagan immediately turned over to Nephy.

"Nephy, I'm going to treat her. Give me a hand."

"Y-Yes." Despite having yet to digest the entire situation, Nephy immediately nodded and softly set Foll down on the ground as she stood up.

And then, as one would expect, Foll woke up.

"...Zagan, you're noisy."

"Sorry about that. You can just go to sleep."

As Foll rubbed her eyes while mumbling, Zagan gave her an apathetic response. But then, she began sniffing the air.

"Huh...? This smell..." And what Foll shifted her focus over to... was the Sacred Sword on Chastille's back.

Ah, crap. By the time Zagan noticed how bad the situation was, Foll's golden eyes were lit up in rage.

"An Angelic Knight!" Foll's arm transformed into that of a dragon. Even if she was merely a young one, her claws could easily tear apart steel. They likely possessed enough destructive power to rival that of Zagan's fist when he wielded it with his power as a sorcerer.

"The hell? H-Hey, Zagan!"

By the time Barbatos raised his voice in a fluster, Foll was already slashing in with her claws.

"Stop that, Foll!" Zagan was somehow able to grab her arm and stop her assault. He managed to stop the fiendish claw right as it was on the boundary of touching Chastille's brow.

Foll was surely scowling.

"Why are you stopping me?"

"She's my guest. Don't go killing her on your own."

Hearing those words made Foll's eyes cloud over with disappointment.

"...I see." She was making a face like she'd been betrayed.

Zagan felt a pain in his chest from having made a young girl who was waiting for him at such a time make that kind of face.

Chastille's condition was a race against time. However, he couldn't just leave Foll alone as she was.

Zagan didn't give any thought to saving someone else as a sorcerer. But even so, Foll was one of the people that Zagan had to protect. And because of that, Zagan quietly questioned her.

"Do you... hate Angelic Knights?"

"...Zagan, you should have already noticed. I became a sorcerer in order to get revenge against Angelic Knights."

Foll had been watching Zagan for the same amount of time that he had been watching her.

I can't... just irresponsibly brush this off, huh? Resigning himself, Zagan nodded.

“So, is the target of your revenge this girl?”

“A Sacred Sword wielder killed my father.”

“I see. Still, it couldn’t have been her.” Taking hold of Foll’s hand, Zagan earnestly appealed to her.

“Hey, Foll. Getting revenge by killing anyone you can get your hands on is a mistake that amateurs often make. Even if you kill this one, it would be of no concern at all to the one you want revenge on. On the contrary, it would only increase the number of enemies you have. And those enemies will likely become further obstacles along your path of vengeance.”

“Zagan, what do you even know about me?” Foll’s voice trembled with anger and irritation as she asked that, and Zagan shook his head.

“That’s why I’m saying you’re an amateur. Real revenge... is different, okay?” Zagan said, then pointing a severe yet warm gaze over at her like an affectionate father, he continued, “Real revenge is to take your target, intently torment them, drag them down to the depths of fear and despair, and finally make them beg you to let them die, got it?”

Hearing that left not only Barbatos, but even Foll completely dumbfounded. However, Zagan simply continued in an indifferent manner.

“And then you kill them when you’re satisfied, at which point your revenge has finally been enacted. Killing them in one breath won’t make you feel refreshed at all. Such a simple revenge... won’t ever save you.”

Zagan’s words were likely taken as being completely serious by her, as a line of sweat ran down Foll’s cheek.

“Zagan, have you also... taken revenge before?”

“Yeah. Though, I killed them in one breath, so I didn’t feel relieved at all... That’s why I’ll teach you the correct way to do it.”

Zagan was talking about the former owner of this castle, the sorcerer who tried to use him as a sacrifice. After being abducted, Zagan was tortured to increase his freshness as a sacrifice. At that time, he found an opening and took him out. However, what he was left with was not the relief of survival or the sense of accomplishment from victory, but hollowness.

I should have tormented that guy to death...

As he was now, Zagan knew of a much more effective method. There were many torture devices at his disposal in this castle, after all. And he would use them to fully sate Foll’s thirst for revenge.

Perhaps overwhelmed by his drive, Foll nodded repeatedly as she bobbed her head.

“G-Got it,” she said, and then her dragon arm returned to its human shape.

“...Hey, are you really okay with teaching that to your adopted daughter?” Barbatos was making an astonished face as he questioned him, but Zagan had no time to pay that any mind.



“Huh...?” As Chastille opened her eyes, she saw an unfamiliar ceiling spread out before her. It looked old and made of stone. However, it was in no way dirty. In fact, she could tell that it had been carefully maintained. And additionally, she could tell it was night out due to the color through the window, so only dim candlelight unreliably illuminated the room.

Where am I...? As Chastille sat there, completely bewildered, she suddenly heard a quiet voice to her side.

“So you’re awake.”

“Za...gan...?”

She caught sight of a sorcerer with a villainous countenance who somehow also had a listless gaze. And in her mind, she was sure his gaze had grown far more gentle than when they last met.

Zagan lowered his sight to a thick book, shifting his focus away from Chastille.

“Give your thanks to Nephy. She was the one who provided treatment.”

“Treatment...” Her head was still in a haze, so she wasn’t able to think properly.



Did I... lose against someone...? If so, then why exactly was I fighting in the first place?

As Chastille let her eyes wander, she spotted a greatsword that was next to her bed. It was a Sacred Sword. Her Sacred Sword. There were no signs of it being dirtied with blood or chipped from crossing swords. And while she stared at it in wonder, halfway at a loss for words, Zagan spoke up as if he was unable to just watch her.

"It seems you ingested some poison. I don't know any more than that myself."

Hearing those words made Chastille recall lost memories.

That's right. I was summoned by a letter...

"The Unification Faction...?"

The man who called out Chastille named himself a member of that group. He lurked in the shadows, so she never quite managed to make out his figure. He claimed that was best for both their sakes. And so, she believed that he was an Angelic Knight just like her.

Regardless, she'd heard the voice of a man who didn't seem all too young. It was calm, and even somehow akin to that of a sage holding deep wisdom. It didn't sound at all like the voice of a person who picked up a sword in order to slay sorcerers.

In a way, it was similar to Clavwell's, but he also came off as far more open-minded. And that man quietly spoke to her.

"Even after a thousand years, the battle with the sorcerers has not come to an end. The church should be a means of keeping sorcerers in check, not a group focused on slaying them. So I suppose you may think of us as a gathering of those who hold such beliefs."

That was the first time Chastille had heard of such a force within the church, and it greatly bewildered her.

After all, in her mind, those were the thoughts of a heretic. And as she voiced those beliefs, the man leisurely laughed.

"And how, pray tell, do your actions differ in that regard?"

As an Archangel, Chastille objected to the subjugation of an Archdemon. If that was not heresy, then what was?

Chastille couldn't say anything to refute the man's point, so he continued speaking.

"Do you have any interest in joining hands with us? You, who has so openly antagonized the church, require powerful allies. And we shall join that rank. By championing you, who wields a Sacred Sword, we too will be able to walk out under the light of the sun. Tell me, is that not a reasonable offer?"

As long as a man like Raphael existed, Chastille wouldn't see the light of the next day. And so, given the situation, this wasn't a situation where she had the luxury to worry about appearances.

Which means... he's a subordinate of His Eminence Clavwell?

Clavwell had said he would rescue Chastille from her current situation, so there was a high probability that he was working with such a force.

But if I take their offer and live, what do I do with the rest of my life...?

She already couldn't see herself serving the church any longer. However, as an Angelic Knight, she no longer had any other path open to her. She had nowhere to return to.

Chastille was unable to answer right away, so the man solemnly assured her.

"It is fine if you do not answer immediately. However, I must warn you not to defer your decision for too long. Let's see... As proof of our sincerity, when you need help, you may call this name."

"Orobas."

The word he spoke felt heavy for some reason. In fact, simply recalling it made her body warm for whatever reason. And as she asked if that was the man's name, he only gave a vague answer.

"I suppose you can say that is both correct and incorrect. You may think of it as the name of our leader."

Leader... If it was the head of an entire force within the church, then it had to be an Archangel, a high-ranking Angelic Knight, or a cardinal. However, Chastille had never heard the name Orobas within the Church.

Which means... It's most likely the name of the organization itself? In any case, she could sense that it was an important name to them.

"That name... will surely protect from any harm." And with those last words, the man's presence vanished.

Is it alright... to trust them...? He was a rather mysterious man. Sure, she wanted to believe him, but if it were a trap, not only Chastille, but even her subordinates were in danger.

After she returned to her room, mulling over the issue all the while, some tea was prepared for her.

Thinking back, she should have remained more vigilant after that meeting. However, since Chastille was deep in thought, she ended up drinking it without a moment's hesitation. And then, by the time she came to, she was being nursed in this place.

Chastille recited those details bit by bit.

That man's voice... I feel like I've heard it somewhere before...

However, it wasn't clear. No, honestly, rather than not remembering it, she thought her conclusion impossible.

As for Zagan, she couldn't tell if he was listening or not, as he simply kept silent while flipping over the pages of his book.

A short time after Chastille's story ended, Zagan spoke in an

uninterested tone.

“Tell me, do you have any idea who may have poisoned you?”

“Hm... I wonder?” Thinking about it normally, Raphael was the obvious conclusion. If Clavwell hadn’t forced his way into their conversation, he may have even cut her down during their initial meeting. Right now, he was obviously the one who wanted her dead most.

However, she had also become an enemy of the church itself. So as it stood, there were innumerable suspects. Potential enemies were a dime a dozen.

Zagan shook his head as if he had read Chastille’s mind as she mulled over all the possibilities.

“That man... Raphael, I think he said? It’s probably not linked to him.”

“Why? Or rather, do you know Lord Raphael?”

As Chastille questioned him, staring on in wonder, Zagan let out a sigh to display that he found the entire situation quite bothersome.

“He got in the way while I was enjoying some liquor, so I lost my cool to an extent.”

That dreadful man seemed ready to even point his sword at Zagan as he baited him into giving up information on Chastille.

“He’s cut down nearly 500 sorcerers. That kind of person would rather kill on the spot than orchestrate an assassination attempt. Instead of serving you poison, he would execute you brazenly with his sword. He seems to have obtained the pretext for that, too.”

“Pretext...?”

Chastille didn’t know what he was talking about, but Zagan didn’t seem keen on sharing more. And while she was perplexed by that fact, Zagan closed his book and stood up.

“For the time being, it seems you’re Nephy’s friend, so I’ll look after you until you regain your strength. The idiots who dare to pick a fight with me are all gone by now, so you should be fine.”

“Wa...it...” As Zagan turned his back to her, Chastille suddenly grabbed his robe.

“...What do you want?” Zagan leaked out a displeased voice, but Chastille merely called out to him in a weak tone in response.

“Can you... stay by my side... for just a little while... maybe...?” Chastille’s voice was impossibly soft for an Archangel.

Well, at this point, I don’t even know who to act tough in front of.

Even though she should have known this day would eventually come, Chastille felt completely and utterly helpless at actually having an attempt at her life made.

Zagan then let out an exasperated sigh.

“...Ask Nephy for that kind of thing.” Those words were thrust her

way. And his response was only obvious, of course. Sure, they'd only met a few times, but Chastille could tell he cherished Nephy from the bottom of his heart. Asking him to comfort her despite knowing all that was extremely unreasonable of her.

However, for some reason, Zagan sat back down on his chair.

"U-Um...?"

"There's no way we can wake Nephy up at such a late hour, right?"

"Um, so, then you'll... stay with me?"

"I'm just going to sit here and read." He refused to face her, but even so, Zagan didn't take his leave.

"...Sorry." Chastille found it pathetic.

What... did I just ask him to do...? Did she want him to turn to face her? Or perhaps, did she want to escape the church and stay by his side?

There's no way... I can force myself in between those two.

Both Zagan and Nephy were impossible to hate, so she wanted to witness their happy future together. And maybe, just maybe, she had a part to play in it as well. However, exactly what form that would take... was something she herself did not know.

For now, at the very least, having somebody by her side eased her worries, and before she knew it, Chastille fell into a deep slumber.



"So, why did it end up like this!?"

Early next morning, Chastille seemed dissatisfied with something as she raised her voice in anger.

She was in the castle's dining hall. After somehow expelling the poison from her system overnight, she managed to get up in the morning and ended up taking breakfast together with the others.

However, the change of clothes Nephy had forced on her had earned her ire.

"I think it suits you very well." Nephy tried to console her in an unimpressive manner.

Chastille was wearing a similar one piece dress and apron to Nephy. Since it was a set of Nephy's spares, even if it was the usual maid uniform, it felt a little unflattering in comparison.

"Grrr... I'm the Maiden of the Sacred Sword, you know? Why do I have to mimic a mere servant!"

"Hey, watch your mouth. I won't forgive anyone who badmouths Nephy." His anger made perfect sense, as calling those the garments of a mere servant was the same as calling Nephy a mere servant. There was no way he could forgive such a thing, even if Chastille was Nephy's friend.

And as he informed her of such with a snap, Chastille finally crumbled to her knees with tears in her eyes.

“...Right now, my heart can’t take much more, so can’t you at least try to be kind to me?”

“Don’t act spoiled.”

There were cold eyes looking down on Chastille the entire time. Foll’s eyes. She was staring at Chastille fixedly from behind Zagan, but the look was in no way amicable. She had stopped thinking about revenge, but that didn’t mean she was ready to accept Chastille with open arms.

Unfortunately, Zagan didn’t really feel like warning her of the situation. And clearly not cluing into Foll’s true feelings, Chastille gently smiled at the child in front of her.

“Ah, you are... Zagan’s adopted child...?”

“Don’t talk to me so familiarly, pony head!”

“P-Pony head...?”

Foll quickly exited the room after screaming that at her. And being so dreadfully rejected made Chastille pin down her chest and prostrated herself on the ground.

“Wh-What exactly did I do wrong...?”

“Sorry, Chastille. I’ll speak to that child later.”

“Hic... Nephy, you’re so kind.”

Nephy expressionlessly spoke comforting words to the pitiful looking girl, and Chastille lifted her head as if she was being healed by them. However, Zagan shook his head.

“No, let Foll off quietly with that. Even if she harasses you a little, it’s not like she’ll kill you.”

“So what, you think it’s all fine and dandy as long as she doesn’t kill me?”

And in response to Chastille’s astonishment, Zagan unexpectedly made a serious expression.

“It seems her father... was killed by a wielder of a Sacred Sword.”

“...” And with that, Chastille was at a loss for words.

Zagan paused for a moment, then quietly continued.

“It’s not like you’re responsible for it or anything, but I can’t tell a brat to make such a clear distinction. I’ll shelter you here, but do understand her circumstances.”

For the time being, making Chastille do some servant work was also partially out of consideration for Foll. She had withdrawn once already, but if Chastille was treated with the hospitality of a welcomed guest, then her anger would have surely risen yet again.

Perhaps feeling a sense of responsibility, Chastille cast her eyes down.

“...Then, wouldn’t it be better... if I leave?”

Hers was a natural reaction, but Zagan shook his head.

“Didn’t I tell you already? It’ll be fine if you just leave Foll be. Despite appearances, she’s of a very proud race. Her pride should keep her from acting out pointlessly.”

...Or so he thought, at least.



A moment later...

“Agh...!” Chastille’s scream resounded throughout the castle.

“...What is it now?”

Zagan called out to Chastille without a hint of compassion as he watched her fall flat on her face.

“Wh-While I was cleaning, a frog... suddenly landed on my head...”

Upon closer inspection, it was obvious there was still a small frog on top of her head. It seemed that while she was mopping the floor, a frog was thrown at her. And it was now the third one in such a short time.

Zagan reflexively burst into laughter when he caught sight of her foolish expression, which was accompanied by her teary eyes.

“D-Don’t laaaugh! Isn’t this different from what you said!?”

It appeared this was all Foll’s doing.

“Ah, looks like this is a result of her trying to harass you without using any power, huh?”

“Didn’t you say her pride would keep her from resorting to harassment?”

“She is just a child, so this much is understandable.”

At the very least, it was far more wholesome than Zagan’s childhood actions, and he didn’t feel like blaming her for each and every little thing.

Chastille then glared back at him fixedly.

“...You’re favoring her an awful lot here, huh? I doubt you’d lay your hands on a child, but it’s unexpected for you to be so lenient.”

“Am I being lenient?”

“You are!”

Chastille vigorously nodded as Zagan tilted his head to the side in confusion. And realizing his own mistake, Zagan averted his gaze as he scratched his head.

“Back when I first met her, I didn’t realize she was a child and ended up slugging her with all my strength. I guess I still feel guilty about that...”

“Slugged, you say... Hold on. If you did, then that means she was originally an enemy, right?”

“Well, yeah,” Zagan replied like it was no big deal, which left

Chastille in shock.

"Then why do you treat that child so much better than me!? We both started out as your enemies, did we not?"

"I didn't really harm you or anything, though. I'm not the type who takes pleasure in hitting a lady."

"L-Lady...?"

For whatever reason, Zagan's reply made Chastille's face turn a bright red.

"Erk, th-then in that case, slug me as well. I hate being hurt, but I'll put up with it just this once!"

"...The hell? Don't tell me you're into that..."

"Y-You're wrong! I just mean I also want to be properly..."

Just what was it that she properly wanted? Chastille had turned bright red and hesitated to speak further.

And while he gazed at that girl, Zagan earnestly pitied her. *This girl's private life really is in shambles, huh...?*

It could also be attributed to Foll's pranks, but she was now opening her mouth, biting down, stammering, and on the verge of tears.

Zagan couldn't really criticize her inability to form words, given the situation. Moreover, since a bucket was knocked over near Chastille, there was dirty water all over. And because such things were happening repeatedly, the place was now dirtier than before she came by to start cleaning.

Back when she faced off against Zagan as an Angelic Knight, she had far more dignity. However, at the same time, her shambled state was also relieving.

If it's like this, then Foll probably won't think of seriously killing her.

Right about this time, having repeatedly pulled such pranks, Zagan suspected that Foll may have begun to harbor doubts about her hatred. In fact, she seemed to even be warming up to a wielder of a Sacred Sword.

By some stroke of luck, it seemed Foll had come across the one person who could make her give up on her quest for vengeance. And while thinking that, Zagan let out a snort with a 'hmph.'

"I don't really get it, but have you gotten some of your pep back?"

"Eh, ah... Were you... worried about me?"

If he wasn't, then he wouldn't have gone out of his way to make Barbatos monitor her. However, Zagan didn't have the personality to just honestly say that aloud, and he felt there was no need to either, so he simply shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" Zagan said, glossing over her question. Then, he sharply glared at her and continued, "More importantly, think about how you're going to deal with the one who poisoned you. You've at

least got an idea, right?"

"Er, that's..." Chastille's face stiffened up instantly. And as if her right hand was searching for something, she repeatedly clenched and unclenched it.

That gesture made Zagan point his gaze over to Chastille's back. *She's not carrying her Sacred Sword, huh?*

Zagan didn't plan to harm her in any way, but to an Angelic Knight like Chastille, this was hostile territory. She even had open hostility pointed to her by Foll, so it was a poor plan to part with her best means of protecting herself. The fact that she set aside her Sacred Sword regardless was an ill omen...

Contrary to expectations, her frustration may be quite deeply rooted, huh?

A wielder of a Sacred Sword parted with their Sacred Sword. That was only possible if they no longer had the will to wield it. After all, even if one were to seize a Sacred Sword, there was no way they could cut down sorcerers or Angelic Knights with half-baked ideals.

Zagan shifted his attention over to the end of the corridor. And over there, Foll was peeking at the state of things with a fixed stare.

I guess I'll tell her to hold back just a little, huh? He didn't plan on letting Chastille stay forever, but having said that, he wasn't going to just throw her out in her current state. If she required more time to get back on her feet, he intended to at least wait.

And afterward, Foll's pranks, which had lightened in severity, only increased in frequency. Before they knew it, Chastille's scream resounding through the castle became a daily occurrence.

In its own way, this may actually prove they're getting along.

Setting aside the means, it looked like some form of communication between Foll and Chastille was born. And as that continued for several days, on a certain evening...

"Master Zagan, this is serious. Foll has gone missing!" Nephy's desperate cries resounded throughout the castle, wiping out any sense of ease within its inhabitants.

Chapter IV: Beating Down an Evil Monster Is the Job of an Angelic Knight

“...Zagan is kind, but there’s no point if I don’t get revenge with my own two hands.”

After slipping out of the castle in the dead of the night, Foll traveled to Archdemon Palace.

Although she withdrew for a moment, in the end, she realized she couldn’t settle down if she didn’t kill the wielder of a Sacred Sword. *But Zagan and Nephy... will never allow it.*

It was difficult to understand how a sorcerer and an Angelic Knight could be friends, but it seemed to be true. And if she killed that friend, they would not forgive her.

“It’s... comfortable there.” She wanted to stay with them forever. She wanted to depend on Zagan, who said they would be together for a thousand years. And, as expected, that was the biggest reason why Foll had not taken action immediately.

In the end, Foll was likely far too young to carry through her revenge. After all, she felt solitude just as heavily as hatred. And Zagan and Nephy mercilessly buried that feeling away by consoling her. At that rate, Foll knew that if she nestled up against them until she became a mature dragon, she would end up forgetting her revenge.

Then there was Chastille, who should have been a target, but... she was a remarkably strange girl. Since Zagan had told Foll not to kill Chastille, she decided to prank her instead. Of course, Zagan and Nephy seemed angry, but she had no intention of stopping when they weren’t even confronting her about it. If, by some chance, Chastille was angered and pointed her Sacred Sword at Foll, then she would have a reason to kill her.

Or so she thought, but Chastille never once pointed her weapon at Foll. On the contrary, she didn’t even carry around her Sacred Sword despite the fact that she was in hostile territory. And yet, just when Foll began to think she had a strong heart, she caught Chastille glaring at her on the verge of tears. Unfortunately, one look at the girl made Foll lose all strength in her shoulders.

Was it not just ludicrous to want to kill such a girl? Perhaps Zagan had anticipated Foll would end up feeling that way, which was why he didn’t say a thing about it. After all, that sole thought had left her

in a state of shock.

“Angelic Knights betrayed Wise Dragon Orobas. I must never... forget that.”

Wise Dragon Orobas... That was the name of Foll’s father. He was a great dragon who lived for a thousand years. His wisdom was profound, and he was sometimes strict, but also incredibly kind. Through his intelligence, he guided not only Foll but even humanity. Foll was proud to call such a distinguished creature her father.

On a certain day, a group of humans who called themselves Angelic Knights stopped by. She didn’t know what they talked about, but her father flew off with the Angelic Knights on his back... and never returned.

By the time the seventh day passed, Foll could no longer wait and took to the skies to search for him. And what she saw was her father... who’d been pierced by a Sacred Sword, and the figure of a man sipping at his blood like a devil. It was no surprise, since a Sacred Sword could easily score a mortal blow even against the Wise Dragon Orobas.

Those Angelic Knights had betrayed her father, who had lent them his power and wisdom many times over. And she would never dare forget that fact. The burning, fiery hatred within her could never be extinguished. And yet, life with Zagan was far too comfortable... It had even almost made her take a liking to her enemy, Chastille.

Is my revenge... so trivial? There was no way it should have been. Sure, she knew there was no way to kill all twelve wielders of the Sacred Swords with her immature powers. But even so, her conscience shouldn’t have allowed her to overlook an enemy that was standing right in front of her.

And so, Foll had traveled to Archdemon Palace to dispel all her doubts. *This place must contain something with enough power to kill an Archangel.*

She was certain that the Archdemon’s legacy would allow her to go toe to toe with her sworn enemies, so even if it meant betraying Zagan and Nephry, she couldn’t stop. However, just as she opened the doors to Archdemon Palace...

“Wow, to think there’s a castle all the way down here.”

Upon hearing that voice, Foll turned around with a shudder. And when she did, she caught sight of a man stepping out of the darkness.

Someone followed me? Because she was in such a rush, she neglected to be vigilant of her surroundings. Still, she didn’t fail to see the greatsword on the figure’s back, and her eyes shot open as soon as she did.

“A Sacred Sword...!”

She could feel the mana on her skin before she even had the

chance to verify the inscription. How could she not? After all, it was the ‘smell’ of the Sacred Sword that cut down her father. She didn’t think there would be another one in town besides Zagan and Nephy’s friend.

Then, as if amusing himself, a smile crept up on the large man’s boorish face.

“You may be a child, but you’re still a sorcerer, I suppose. It’s rather impressive that you saw through me before I even unsheathed my blade.”

And then, Foll finally saw his face.

“You’re...” It was without a doubt the face of the human who drank Orobas’ blood.

“Hmm, who the hell are you? I don’t recall getting to know any dumb brats like you.”

In that instance, Foll felt something snap inside her head.

“YOU BASTAAAAAARD!” Foll roared, then instantly transformed both of her hands into those of a dragon, green wings piercing out of her back.

She never even thought of using sorcery. Her mind was consumed by rage, so she simply slashed at him with her claws.

However, the Archangel drew his sword far faster than even Foll’s full power could muster.

“Ah...” And in response, a befuddled voice leaked out of her.

This is... the power of a Sacred Sword... Aside from an Archdemon like Zagan, no one could just recklessly face such a threat. Foll had become a sorcerer precisely because she knew that all too well, but she had still made a fatal mistake in the end...

The engraved blade came swinging down at Foll’s neck. And her final thoughts at that moment were of the faces Zagan and Nephy made as they gently brushed her head.

“Zagan...” she whispered desperately as she shut her eyes, accepting her imminent doom... However, the pain that she feared did not arrive no matter how long she waited.

In its stead was the sensation of an arm embracing her gently from behind. And then, an arrogant voice resounded throughout the room.

“I suppose I did tell you to act as you please, but I think I should at least set a curfew.”

“...Huh?”

Miraculously, Zagan’s arm stopped the Sacred Sword dead in its tracks.



“Well now... So you blocked my blow, Archdemon.”

Zagan had caught Raphael’s Sacred Sword with his bare hand...

That being said, there *was* a magic circle acting as a shield between his skin and the blade.

It was a greatsword with a pure white blade. And on its surface were crests which differed from those used in sorcery, but were also somehow subtly different from Chastille's. It seemed the engravings on the Sacred Swords differed from blade to blade.

So that means... it's the weapon's inscribed name? Zagan inspected his arm as he held the object of his fascination at bay.

The skin on the hand that was gripping the blade was torn, but it wasn't burning like the last time. And that was despite Raphael's sword skills being far sharper than what Chastille had displayed.

It seems even a Sacred Sword can't overwhelm the Sigil of the Archdemon, huh? If this was ordinary old Zagan, he would've lost his right arm already. However, thanks to the mana of an Archdemon, there was no sign the Sacred Sword would be able to cut through it.

Relying on a tool doesn't feel all very good, though. On that point, since his opponent was also using a powerful tool, it was probably fine to just think that they were even.

Getting back to the matter at hand, Raphael seemed unable to move due to Zagan's hold on his Sacred Sword. And as the two of them stood there, Foll's trembling voice leaked out from within Zagan's arms.

"Zagan, why...?"

"I just happened across a convenient courier. And I figured you were here, so I had him teleport me over."

Zagan's feet were still submerged within a dark shadow, but it was clear to everyone present that it wasn't a result of his sorcery.

"I'm no courier, dammit!" Barbatos barked out, his voice thick with anger. And after he suddenly appeared from the shadow, he took up a position as far away from Raphael as possible. It looked as if he wanted nothing to do with their fight.

"I told you you'd be handsomely rewarded, didn't I? Don't complain."

Zagan had ordered him to monitor Chastille. And thankfully, sorcerers always remained faithful to their contracts. Even after he freed Chastille, this man kept following that order, which was why he got an immediate response as he called out to him upon learning of Foll's disappearance.

"Master Zagan, is Foll safe?"

It appeared that the shadow was still connected to the castle, so Zagan, of course, replied to Nephy's question in a gentle tone.

"Foll is safe. We'll head right back after I clean up the place. Just wait at the castle, Nephy."

"Understood." In truth, Nephy definitely wanted to charge over to

Foll's side as well. But even so, she decided to keep her feelings in check as she could tell things were about to get messy.

"...Well, anyway, let's head back. Children shouldn't be walking around this late at night. We're going home," Zagan said in his usual arrogant tone. However, Foll shook her head.

"No, that makes no sense... I... betrayed you... And yet, why...?"

What, is that all? Zagan gently brushed Foll's head as tears began to well up in her eyes.

"I told you to do what you want, right? Don't sweat the small stuff."

Upon hearing that answer, Foll buried her face in Zagan's chest. The dragon wings then vanished from her back, and her arms and legs returned to those of a human.

"So...rry..."

"Sheesh... What did I just say, Foll?" It didn't seem like he was getting through to her, since she kept worrying over the smallest things.

Thank goodness... I made it...

If he had arrived even a single second later, Zagan would have lost her. And compared to that, Foll sneaking into Archdemon Palace all on her own was truly worthless.

Eventually, after staying like that for a while, Zagan stared at Raphael.

"I already warned you, didn't I? I told you that if you try to do as you please in my domain, I'll crush and grind you into the ground."

In response to that, the Angelic Knight with an evil countenance replied in a voice full of confusion.

"Now this is odd... Are you saying a sorcerer is covering for a stranger?"

"She's not a stranger. This girl... is my daughter." And Raphael had dared to draw his sword on her.

I have no reason to let this man live, do I?

He wasn't standing before Nephy at the moment. Plus, there was also the fact that he was the reason for Foll's grudge, so Zagan decided to torment him as much as he could before killing him.

Raphael then narrowed his eyes as if resigning himself.

"I see... A daughter, huh? This is rather understandable, then."

"That's how it is... Foll, back off a little."

After pushing Foll away, Zagan let go of the weapon in his grasp, and Raphael took his distance without stumbling, correcting his stance with his Sacred Sword at the ready.

The whole situation made Zagan knit his brows. *I mean, we're this late into it and there's no bloodlust?* It wasn't like Raphael had no fighting spirit, but Zagan couldn't sense any bloodlust from his sword.

And yet, he was surely planning on fighting Zagan with it.

“...Since it’s come to this, allow me to warn you. If you don’t resist me with all your might, I will slaughter you.”

“Though I am reluctant, you’ve left me no other choice. I cannot afford to die in this place,” Raphael muttered, then finally unleashed his bloodlust.

“Heed my call... Sacred Sword Metatron,” Raphael announced that name, which made a pallid flame burst out of his Sacred Sword.

“...” Zagan felt like letting out a groan, but just narrowly endured it. At that moment, it finally dawned on him that he had been toyed with back at the bar.

Brandishing his dazzling, shining Sacred Sword, Raphael began to speak.

“This is the power that has vanquished former Archdemons, reducing all evil to ashes. Come now, face my Flames of Purification. Face the power that only true masters of the Sacred Sword can manipulate.” That was likely why a Sacred Sword chose its own wielder, as wielding such awesome power could not come easy.

So this is... the true power of the Sacred Sword...!?

Waves of heat rolled off the Flames of Purification. And the mere touch of them dismantled Zagan’s magic circle. Even as he tried to weave together new sorcery, they were destroyed as soon as he finished constructing the circuit. At that point, any average sorcerers would have been reduced to a powerless state already.

“The hell... What’s with this guy?”

The destructive power of the Sacred Sword was one thing, but Raphael’s bloodlust had a fierceness to it like that of a beast of prey taking chase. Even Barbatos had felt overwhelmed and drew back in fear.

Despite all that, however, Foll’s trembling voice leaked out from behind Zagan.

“Zagan, why...?” She was likely questioning why Zagan bothered to provoke Raphael. After all, if he had been making light of him, it would have been easier to gain the upper hand.

Zagan then responded to her in a gentle voice.

“I said I would teach you the proper way to enact revenge, right? Trampling your enemy underfoot while they put all their power into resisting you is one way. It will humiliate them and drag them down into the depths of despair.”

Raphael was emanating a near inhuman bloodlust, but there was no doubt in Zagan’s mind that he was an enemy he could defeat. *Besides, finishing off an Archangel will become the perfect foil.*

On the surface, those who opposed Zagan had vanished, but there were still those lying in wait for him to let his guard down. The defeat

of an Archangel's would serve as the perfect final deterrent.

After mulling over such thoughts, Zagan kicked off the ground. The stone ground was smashed to pieces, and he closed in on Raphael instantly.

"Hnnngh."

"Too slow," Raphael said as he swung his sword downward, but Zagan dared to catch it with his right hand.

He was barehanded, but it wasn't a fist. No, within Zagan's palm, a magic circle made of condensed mana lit up. It appeared small, but in truth, all of the lights that appeared to form lines were circuits. In fact, the number he constructed easily surpassed 2000 in count. And Raphael's initial strike was also blocked by this magic circle.

No matter how strong those Flames of Purification were, they could not possibly burn through 2000 circuits in an instant. *Shall I name it Heaven's Scale, then?*

Zagan did not put much faith in the power of an Archdemon. After all, he'd once had his sorcery cut apart by a Sacred Sword. And that was exactly why he'd developed a new technique to repel Sacred Swords.

However, despite it being complex in nature, it was not special in any way, shape, or form. Instead, it was simply solid.

It took in not only his enemy's sorcery, but even the mana surrounding it to continue enhancing itself. It was sorcery that was completely useless in the hands of anyone but Zagan. And that magic circle whose only merit was being solid... threw back the Sacred Sword, a clang reverberating through the air.

The impact was likely similar to striking a lump of rocks with a sword. Any ordinary person would surely have had the bones in their arms shatter from it. But even so, Raphael did not drop his Sacred Sword.

"Well, it's quite admirable for you not to let go of your sword after experiencing such pain."

"Ghhh..."



Unfortunately for Zagan, the Flames of Purification still continued to burn. And even as an anguished expression crept up on Raphael's face, he immediately adjusted his grip on the sword and came rushing in.

It was a straightforward downward slash with the Sacred Sword held overhead. However, dazzled by the shining flame, a pure white afterimage was burned into Zagan's eyes. His pure skill with the sword and the power to burn sorcery were nuisances on their own, but Zagan knew having his sense of sight impaired would prove fatal. And so, Zagan quickly pulled back his rear leg and swiveled his body. The tip of the white blade practically grazed his nose as it struck the ground. And with a rumble, the earth shook.

"Whoa—" Foll let out a small scream.

The Flames of Purification ran across the ground. It seemed Raphael's strike had carved a deep fissure into the stone floor. And with the size of Foll's body, it was large enough to completely engulf her. *This damn mindless brute strength of his...*

Enhanced by his Anointed Armor and Sacred Sword, Raphael's physical strength reached Zagan's, even though he was a sorcerer who specialized in combat.

It was clear that in a simple bout of physical ability, no Archdemon could ever hope to match Raphael, so it stood to reason that an average sorcerer would only get slaughtered. And even while witnessing that power in action right before his eyes, Zagan's expression remained composed.

"It'd be troublesome if you caused too much damage to this place," Zagan said, then sharply stepped in to drive his Heaven's Scale into Raphael's face from below. Unfortunately, Raphael quickly pulled back his Sacred Sword and caught the palm with it. And once the two forces clashed, a dull shockwave ran through him with a thud.

"How foolish, a strike with such a long stroke won't—" Raphael's sneering face contorted and he cut his words short. That only made sense, as his large body was sent flying despite his flawless defense. Somehow, Zagan's Heaven's Scale blew away Raphael along with his Sacred Sword.

"Oops, it's pretty hard to control how strong it is, huh...?"

The Sacred Sword was categorized as a greatsword, and it had a wide blade. In exchange for the large attack range it prided itself on, it couldn't be maneuvered well, so when closed in on its destructive potential was halved.

Actually, Zagan was only able to stop the initial attack because he combined the power of his Heaven's Scale with his ideal positioning. And yet, his strike had sent Raphael flying back to his ideal range.

Lowering his back, Zagan pushed forward as if digging the 'Heaven's Scale' into the ground. And once he closed in on his foe, he pushed up his palm toward him.

This time, however, Raphael was ready, and he swung down his Sacred Sword with both his hands.

Zagan's Heaven's Scale and Raphael's Sacred Sword collided, making sparks scatter with a clang. And after a moment, Heaven's Scale shattered and the Flames of Purification dispersed.

It seemed the Heaven's Scale and Flames of Purification were dead even.

"Impossible."

"I see. Three shots is the limit, huh?" Zagan muttered, seeming utterly unimpressed.

He exchanged three upfront blows with a Sacred Sword. It was magnificent power, but it still wasn't enough. If there were two, or even three opponents, then it would prove useless.

It was superb for the first performance experiment, but it was still far from complete. And as Zagan calmly verified the efficiency of his sorcery, Barbatos shouted at him.

"You dumbass! Now's not the time to be so easygoing, dammit!"

Raphael's stance was in shambles, but he still hadn't let go of his Sacred Sword.

And as he saw that, Zagan let out a small sigh.

"I told you before, didn't I? I have the leisure to do these things."

With his posture broken, Raphael's abdomen was wide open. And also, with the Flames of Purification gone, other sorcery could now be woven together.

Faster than Raphael could swing down his Sacred Sword, Zagan drove his left fist into Raphael's side. There were already several magic circles wrapped around that arm, and they were rotating. This was the very same sorcery that finished off Barbatos once before. Even without using something like Heaven's Scale, Zagan's fist could crush mere Anointed Armor without difficulty.

He could feel the sensation of bone's breaking with a snap. The shockwave from the strike surely even pierced through his entrails.

"GHAAA?" Raphael vomited out blood as he was blown away, and after crashing into Archdemon Palace's gate, he collapsed inside the entrance hall.

It was settled. Zagan had grasped victory... though he still curiously tilted his head to the side.

"How weak. Is this really the Angelic Knight who's killed nearly 500 sorcerers?"

Even the most dreadful Archangel was unable to inflict a single wound on Zagan. In other words, it proved that the church had no

means to oppose an Archdemon.

Zagan then took a fleeting glimpse behind him at Foll. The young dragon was making a befuddled expression, but before long, she came to her senses and suddenly began clapping her hands.

What's this? It's not bad... Or rather, it somehow feels good, huh?

Zagan snuck in a wave back to her. And as she noticed that, Foll's eyes began sparkling.

All he had done was crush and grind an eyesore into the ground, and yet, Foll's straightforward envious gaze felt almost pleasant to him. Even though up until now, when the riffraff pointed such gazes at him, he never felt a thing.

And as Zagan's face slackened up all on its own from that, Barbatos groaned, sweat running down his brow.

"...You damn monster. You're not even short of fucking breath, are you?"

Well, that was surely the normal reaction. Certainly, Raphael's sword skills were sharp enough to overwhelm someone around Barbatos' level, but Angelic Knights were different from sorcerers. If they received even one fatal wound, then it was all over.

Back when Zagan beat down Barbatos, even after striking him in the same way, he was able to stand back up given the time, but the same did not hold true for Raphael. Or well, that *should have* been the case, at least...

"I... see. What terrifying... power." Even while spitting out blood, Raphael stood up with his Sacred Sword acting as a crutch.

Seriously, what's this guy? And in turn, Zagan readied himself and gathered mana in both his hands once more.



A little while earlier.

"I should go..." Foll had probably rushed out because of Chastille. And sure, Chastille knew she hadn't done anything wrong, but telling such a young child to forgive her was unreasonable. Zagan should have driven Chastille out.

Naturally, she was grateful that he was sheltering her, but she still felt there was no point if it ended up hurting Foll.

Zagan rushed over to Foll's room as soon as he heard Nephys' cries, and Chastille tried to follow him, but...

I've become too hesitant... to grip my Sacred Sword. That was why she had gotten a late start, and by the time she finally reached Foll's room, Zagan was no longer anywhere to be seen.

"Nephys, where's Zagan...?"

"Master Zagan... has gone off to bring Foll back." The snow-white elven girl tightly pursed her lips, gazing at the ominous shadow

spread across the ground as she spoke.

The sight made Chastille recall the past. She remembered the incident where they were abducted by a sorcerer named Barbatos. At that time, they were swallowed by a similar ominous shadow. And it seemed Zagan had reached Foll thanks to that very same sorcery.

“Are you... not going?”

“Master Zagan ordered me... to wait here.” And that was the only reason she didn’t pursue them.

“Then I will...” Chastille started speaking, but her feet came to a stop.

I’ll go... and do what exactly? Even though the poison had already left her system, Chastille couldn’t put strength into her arms and legs. And even though her Anointed Armor was left beside her bed, there was no time to go get it and put it on. Moreover, she was a target of the church despite being an Archangel.

Having said that, living under the protection of Zagan, who she had been hostile to in the past, was also out of the question.

But still... do I even have a reason to wield the Sacred Sword? She questioned herself, then sank to the floor with a thud when no answers came to mind.

“Are you alright? If you’re not feeling well again, then...” Nephy immediately ran over and supported her body.

“No, I’m... fine...”

“Are you certain...?”

Honestly, nothing about Chastille looked fine in the least. And while Nephy was expressionless, the tips of her ears quivered as if she was worried about her.

Eventually, Chastille let out a small sigh.

“This may be the wrong time to say this, but I am a little... jealous of you.”

As Chastille unintentionally let out a complaint, Nephy stared back at her in wonder. And seeing that change in her from her expression alone shocked Chastille.

Compared to when I first met her, she’s far better at expressing her feelings. That was surely also thanks to Zagan.

Even to Chastille’s eyes, which were not all that familiar with them, the harmonious relation between those two was clear as day.

To love, and be loved... For such a relationship to be permitted... It makes me jealous.

There was likely something wrong with Chastille for thinking such a thing of an enemy. But even so, she wanted to be the person who healed that man’s loneliness.

However, Nephy shook her head.

“Is that so? As for me, I am jealous of you, Chastille.”

“...Haha. What about me could you possibly envy?” As Chastille deprecated herself, Nephy tightly gripped her skirt and continued.

“I mean, Chastille, are you not able to run over to Master Zagan’s side?” Those were words filled with strong emotion, which was unusual for Nephy.

“The only thing I can do is wait for him here. Master Zagan is extremely strong, but he may be forced to go through painful things. And in the end, Foll might even leave without me being able to convey my feelings to her.”

The anxiety of those who had to wait for their loved ones to return from the battlefield wasn’t known to those who could join them. And Chastille was not among those who had to wait.

But what do you think I can accomplish by going...?

While Chastille remained unable to say anything, Nephy kept speaking.

“I cannot even go to his side to comfort or support him.”

Even I’d like to do that sort of thing... And yet... For some reason, Chastille shook her head as if she was extremely frustrated.

“So what, are you saying I should go do that? I’m your enemy, you know? Wouldn’t it be better if you just ignore Zagan’s order and chase after him!?”

As Chastille raised her voice, something soft and white gently wrapped around her face.

“I cannot do that.” It was Nephy. Chastille was now being embraced by Nephy.

“After all, my duty is to greet Master Zagan with a ‘welcome home’ when he returns,” while saying that, Nephy gently brushed Chastille’s head.

“Besides, I must protect the castle while Master Zagan is absent.”

She likely did not mean that in the sense of fighting. Those words meant that she would create a space where her master could relax upon his return.

And having her head stroked while being embraced, all strength left Chastille’s body. She had let the complaints that she should have never spoken of rush out of her mouth. Even if she tried to endure it, having lost her way as she did now, it could no longer be helped.

“Even I... didn’t want to point my sword at him...”

“I know,” Nephy said, quietly nodding while brushing Chastille’s head.

“But I’m an Angelic Knight and all...”

“I know,” Nephy remarked once more, then simply nodded without denying or affirming her actions.

In that moment, Chastille found Nephy’s chest to be comfortingly warm and clung to her.

“I’m forced to suffer through all this just because I was honest about not wanting to fight Zagan...”

“I know.”

She’d had her Sacred Sword revoked for a while, was glared at by an Archangel stronger than her, and then was poisoned and on the verge of death. When Chastille thought of all that, tears came pouring out drop after drop, staining Nephy’s pretty nightgown. And yet, Nephy didn’t look displeased at all and continued to soothe her mind. The sight made Chastille unable to bear it any longer, so she lashed out.

“I didn’t want to defeat him. I wanted to fight by his side!”

Chastille’s words were heresy considering her position as an Archangel. Any normal person would scorn her for having such selfish thoughts about a sorcerer. And yet, Nephy nodded as if to praise her.

“So you do understand after all.”

As Chastille raised her face to look Nephy in the eyes, Nephy simply gazed back at her with her usual expression.



“Back when I first talked to you, you said that Master Zagan appeared lonely... It appears you really do understand him well, Chastille.” Nephly was surely talking about when they met after she was driven out by Zagan. And though she spoke as if the meeting was nostalgic, her ears also quivered in frustration.

“In truth, I felt a tad envious. I mean, I thought that I was the only one... who could understand Master Zagan.”

Chastille and Zagan’s first meeting ended with him saving her, but Zagan never sought any compensation from her for the act. On the contrary, it wasn’t even clear if Zagan remembered the incident.

Still, the profile of his lonely face remained burned into Chastille’s mind. At that time, it almost seemed as if the one that needed to be saved was not her, but him. *And Nephly... saved Zagan.*

As Zagan was now, that shadow of loneliness was nowhere to be found. Unlike Chastille, who had noticed it but did nothing, Nephly returned to save Zagan even after being driven out of the castle.

As Chastille remained in a daze, reflecting on such thoughts, Nephly brushed aside her bangs and spoke once more.

“But... I also felt equally happy. I mean, why wouldn’t I after finding out there was another person who understood Master Zagan.”

Nephly’s encouraging words somehow charmed Chastille. *You’ve... become strong, huh?*

She had finally reached the point where she could say such words to someone other than Zagan. And after pausing for a moment, Nephly struck Chastille’s shoulders with a thud.

“Are you alright now?” Nephly inquired.

“Ah... Y-Yes...” Chastille responded. And though she was feeling better, the long embrace had turned her face red. Working up the courage, she timidly asked a question in turn.

“Could it be... that you were trying to comfort me?” There was no real need to confirm it. Still, she wasn’t so sure of herself that she felt comfortable assuming things.

And in response, Nephly tilted her head to the side with a puzzled expression on her face.

“Yes... Um, could it be that I didn’t do a good job?”

“That’s not what I mean. Just... why? Um, aren’t I an enemy to all sorcerers?”

Over the past few days, they’d shared meals, cleaned together, and slept under the same roof, so even Chastille thought it was strange to bring that up all of a sudden.

Nevertheless, at the root, they should have been enemies. And in response to that, Nephly tilted her head to the side as if she found the question silly.

“I mean, aren’t we friends?”

So this girl... also feels that way? That was the precise moment Chastille realized there was no winning against her. And at the same time, she decided she wanted to protect the things Nephy cherished.

After all that, Chastille wiped away her tears and stood up.

“Sorry. I’ve shown you something disgraceful,” she said.

“It’s fine,” Nephy replied. And as she continued with a ‘besides,’ her lips loosened. It was still awkward, but that was most definitely a smile.

“Clearing away sources of Master Zagan’s concerns is another one of my duties.”

“By concerns, you mean me?”

“Yes. He has been quite worried about you since the incident with Lord Barbatos.”

Chastille doubted her ears as she heard those words.

“He didn’t even remember my face, you know?”

“There’s no way that was true. Or at least, that was how it appeared to me.” If Nephy was the one saying it, then it was likely true. And with that, Chastille resolved herself, cementing her decision in her mind.

“Thank you. I’m also... heading out now,” Chastille said, realizing that she no longer had anything to lose at that point.

Then, at least this one last time, I’d like to do as I please.

That man may not have truly needed her, but Chastille wanted to lend him her aid regardless. That was why she took a step forth into the shadow. She wore no Anointed Armor, but she was carrying her Sacred Sword in hand.

“Yes. Take care, Chastille.”

Chastille vanished into the shadow as those words echoed around her.



Back at Archdemon Palace, Raphael stood up, ignoring his smashed Anointed Armor and fatal wound.

Surprised, Zagan observed his state without letting his guard down. *It’s... not sorcery, huh? Is this the power he obtained from slaying a dragon?* If it were sorcery, then Zagan could ‘eat’ it, but honestly, it was hard to imagine an Angelic Knight would stain their hands with it.

An Archangel who could stand back up after suffering a fatal wound truly was a nightmarish existence to sorcerers. Even an Archdemon candidate would have trouble defeating him. However, a delighted smile crept up on Zagan’s face.

“Thank goodness, right, Foll? Seems he won’t go down so easy.

Put some thought into how to punish him.”

“Er, um...” Foll gulped down as if recoiling at his words, but she immediately nodded, her eyes filled with a sharp wrath.

Raphael quietly gazed at Foll as she did that. It was probably just Zagan’s imagination, but his eyes looked to be colored by compassion and grief as he stared at her. After staring at them for a while, he threw out a question in a severe voice that also somehow sounded like a sigh.

“It seems I am quite detested among you lot.”

“You raised your hand against my daughter, so of course I’m angry. Plus, you yourself have killed nearly 500 sorcerers, right? Saying you don’t like being resented is like saying they’re no better than insects.”

“Well, what’s your damn reason?” Raphael said, then shifted his focus over Foll.

And gritting her teeth, Foll glared back at him and spat out some venomous words.

“The Wise Dragon, Orobas... That’s the name of the dragon you murdered.”

That was the first time Zagan heard Foll speak that name.

It’s a name that’s etched into history when it comes to sorcery and folklore, a legendary dragon. Using sorcerers as an example, he was on the same level as Marchosias.

Zagan never dreamed that Foll would be that dragon’s daughter. However, he had some reservations about the idea. *Is a legendary dragon something that can be struck down by someone so weak?*

In all fairness, Raphael’s power approached the very limits of human potential. Unfortunately for him, however, his strength paled in comparison to Zagan’s. Under normal circumstances, it would have taken an army of a thousand average sorcerers or humans to strike him down.

Still, Raphael *was* able to stand back up after taking the full brunt of Zagan’s blow, which was most likely due to the power he gained upon slaying Orobas. But in that case, how had he even managed to defeat the dragon in the first place? The power he showed Zagan was clearly nowhere near enough...

Upon hearing Orobas’ name, Raphael’s eyes shot wide open.

“...I see. Orobas’ child, huh?” For whatever reason, his voice sounded tired as he said that. And pulling his Sacred Sword off the ground, he focused his strength into his hands.

“Then there’s no way I don’t kill you here!” Raphael exclaimed, brandishing his Sacred Sword and charging at Foll as he did.

“Do you think I’ll allow that?” Zagan coldly stated, shooting his fist out at Raphael’s face.

Any average sorcerer would have had their head caved in by that blow, but the large Angelic Knight merely bent backward and flew through the air. Still, there was definite feedback in that strike. Zagan could also tell that the bones in his jaw were smashed. And because the jaw had many nerves which connected to the teeth, a blow to that spot jolted the brain greatly.

Be it a sorcerer, an Angelic Knight, or a dragon, there was none who could stand up after that. *I don't know what you're thinking, but I'll render you powerless for the time being.*

Raphael crashed into the ground headfirst, losing consciousness immediately... Or at least, that was what was supposed to happen.

"Hnnngh!" Somehow, with agility that didn't befit a man with such a large frame, Raphael twisted around and landed on both feet. It seemed his tenacity surpassed any sense of pain.

"What the?"

And then, just like that, he slipped by Zagan's side and rushed past him. Since he'd been convinced he had delivered a fatal blow, Zagan was unable to react immediately, which left only a defenseless Foll in his path.

"Don't... underestimate me!" Foll screamed, charging powerful sorcery in her hand.

"Stop that, Foll!" Zagan called out to her in restraint, but Foll stood her ground and fired off sorcery toward Raphael instead.

I won't make it in time! And just as he thought that... a sharp clang rang out, and blade collided with blade.

Two white Sacred Swords collided, a shockwave akin to a pallid chime echoing into the surroundings. Like a ripple of water, the ring of light that accompanied it ran through the entire underground hollow as well as Archdemon Palace's interior and vanished.

Yes, another Sacred Sword intercepted his blow.

"...Will you not stop this already, Lord Raphael?" And the one who caught that sword, appearing out of nowhere, was Chastille.

"Ah, crap. I forgot to close the shadow," Barbatos muttered in a deadpan tone.

It seemed that while Zagan was fighting, Chastille had crossed over through the shadow and chased them all the way here. Luckily she'd arrived in the nick of time. Though there were tears in the corner of her eyes and the tip of her nose was red for some odd reason.

Unfortunately, as one would expect, she had no time to don her Anointed Armor. But still, she at least held her Sacred Sword in hand as she appeared in her ultramarine shirt and skirt.

Chastille had managed to stop the strike of an Archangel without the divine protection of Anointed Armor. An admirable feat, all things

considered, but there was something that amazed him far more than that or her sudden arrival.

This girl... stopped both Raphael's Sacred Sword and Foll's sorcery at the same time.

Foll had fired out sorcery to intercept Raphael, but it had vanished before piercing her target. And it wasn't like that happened by accident, either. No, her sorcery had been dismantled. From that, it became clear that Chastille was far more focused than when she fought Zagan.

"What... are you planning?" Foll growled as she glared at Chastille.

And yet, Chastille replied in a subdued voice as she repelled Raphael's Sacred Sword.

"You've been pulling pranks on me nonstop, but I'll admit I'm the one at fault for disturbing your peaceful life. So tell me, can we not try to talk things over?" Chastille's words were clear and composed, as if her gloominess in the castle was a mere facade.

Seems like she's gathered her resolve. Zagan didn't sense even a hint of hesitation or fear in her. And, in order to ease the tension in the air, Zagan walked up to Foll's side and bopped her head.

"Well, you two should definitely try to talk things out... but wait a little for now."

"Why?" Chastille uttered that question in confusion, but Zagan turned his attention to Raphael instead.

"I'd really like to interrogate this guy right about now, but he probably can't talk with how his jaw is, huh?"

Zagan's blow had completely shattered Raphael's jaw. And though he started regenerating already, it was still not in a state where speaking was possible. Really, it was admirable that he could grip his sword and run around like that with such energy despite all the damage he'd suffered.

At that very moment, Raphael fell to his knees. It seemed he'd finally exhausted himself. Similarly, Chastille sank to the floor, clearly out of breath. It had probably taken everything she had to hold back his blow.

That damn Raphael... Why'd his bloodlust vanish right as he charged at Foll?

The timing was suspicious. Plus, just as he thought, the blow Zagan dealt him was actually fatal. That meant even if Chastille didn't force her way through, he didn't possess enough strength to kill Foll.

She may have looked like a child, but Foll was an Archdemon candidate, one of the strongest sorcerers in the world. That was why Zagan told her to stop, as he didn't want Raphael dead quite yet. Zagan loomed over Raphael threateningly, then spoke up.

“I’m a villain. A sorcerer won’t think twice about torturing an Angelic Knight. However, I’d feel bad beating on an opponent with no real will to fight. Come now, tell me exactly what you’re trying to do here.”

There was absolutely no way he felt any sense of compassion or mercy toward this man, and Zagan had no intention of getting all buddy-buddy with Raphael, either. It was just that the whole situation didn’t sit well with him. It unnerved him that Raphael was fighting with a death wish.

“Killing someone who seems to be asking for it isn’t my style. Frankly, I find the thought repulsive.”

Those words made Foll’s eyes shoot open in shock.

“What... do you mean?”

“I’m not too sure. That’s why I’m trying to talk to him,” Zagan responded, though it wasn’t like he didn’t have a guess.

When he heard the name Orobas, his bloodlust vanished. It was the name of the dragon Raphael was said to have killed. If he lost his fighting spirit upon learning that Foll was that dragon’s daughter, then an obvious reason for his actions sprung to mind.

‘Atonement.’ Zagan didn’t think an Angelic Knight would ever feel indebted to a dragon or a sorcerer. And yet, that simple explanation made all the pieces fit into place.

And while Zagan was looking down on Raphael, Chastille pulled at the hem of his robe.

“H-Hold on, Zagan.”

“...Things will only grow more complicated if you get involved. Just stay quiet for a bit.”

“No, listen,” Chastille rebuked Zagan, then turned her gaze to Raphael and continued, “I find this hard to believe, but I’m right, aren’t I?”

“What are you talking about?” Zagan asked, clearly exasperated, as Chastille resumed her questioning in a clear tone.

“You are... the hooded man who visited me in the church... Orobas, correct?”

“What...?” Zagan and Foll exclaimed.

Their shock came as no surprise, as Orobas was the name of Foll’s father... It was the name of the dragon Raphael had killed, so hearing it made both Zagan and Foll doubt their ears. The only one among them who couldn’t follow the conversation was Barbatos, and he looked completely flabbergasted.

“Hey, what do you mean by that?”

Right as Zagan said that and stepped closer to Chastille... ‘something’ broke with a crack.



Correcting the grip on her Sacred Sword, Chastille let out a trembling voice.

“Zagan...”

“I know.”

The sound rang out from Archdemon Palace. And from deep beyond the smashed gate, they could sense something had begun moving.

Is something... there...? It was ‘something’ that wasn’t there the other day when Zagan and the others investigated the place.

At that exact moment, an eerie atmosphere filled the room. It was a strange wind that seemed to coil and creep around one’s skin, making it difficult to breathe. Even though there was no odor, Zagan’s stomach felt like it was contracting, which made him nauseous.

A harmful aura... seemed like an apt description for it.

The cursed wind tore away at the flesh like it was a matter of course, but most remarkable was its ability to gnaw on the soul.

“Ugh... Guh...” Chastille pinned down her chest in pain. In addition to her recent poisoning, she was now without her Anointed Armor, which left her the most defenseless out of everyone present. And so, since there were no other options, Zagan stood in front of Chastille to cover for her.

Barbatos then let out a flustered voice.

“H-Hey... What happened?”

“Hell if I know,” Zagan replied. Eventually, that ‘something’ showed its figure from the other side of Archdemon Palace’s gate. And it... resembled a human.

From the top, it had a cranium, two arms, and two legs. However, it absolutely was not a human. Its skin was made of something as stiff as stone, and it throbbed in an eerie manner with every single breath. Black fissure-like tendons ran along its body, and Zagan could somehow tell these were its veins.

Despite all that, what differed above all else... was its face. Its mouth, which was filled with tightly packed little fangs, was on its forehead, and its bloodshot glaring eyes were in the center of its face and around the left ear. It had no nose, but in its stead were barnacle-like cylinders sticking out here and there that sucked in and spat out air. No, not air... mana.

Zagan could tell just by looking at Chastille’s reaction as she gripped her chest. Be it human, creature, or nature, it coveted the mana of all who possessed it, devouring it incessantly.

However, Zagan knew of this air. In fact, he even recalled the very figure before them.

“This is... a demon?” Zagan muttered, then immediately realized he was wrong.

I don't feel as much fear toward it as the demon from back then.

He was, of course, recalling the incident where Barbatos summoned a demon. The monster before his eyes clearly resembled it, but the demon he'd met before was a more heterogeneous creature.

Before long, Foll spoke as if groaning out.

“Wrong. This is... Archdemon Palace's... gatekeeper.”

It was a sculpture modeled after a demon sealed by some sort of magic circle.

“...I see. So it's the aftermath of the collision between the Sacred Swords just now, huh?”

Either the seal was broken, or perhaps it was coincidentally activated. *No, it was probably the seal.*

Marchosias was not so senile that this could be mere coincidence.

“So it's a type of golem...?” Even if it imitated a demon, its origin was completely different. At the very least, it was not an absolute existence that Zagan feared he couldn't defeat.

Having said that, it was Marchosias' legacy. That surely meant it wasn't a poorly made puppet like its appearance suggested.

To Zagan, this was an exceedingly unknown existence.

“Im...possible...”

The one to let a hoarse voice... was Raphael. It appeared he'd recovered enough to at least talk.

I'd like to hear this guy's story right about now...

Unfortunately, it didn't seem likely that the monster before his eyes would just listen to what Zagan had to say. Nothing could be done about having to eliminate it first.

“Now then, what's to be done here?”

And just as Zagan muttered to himself... The eyeball at the monster's side wriggled and glared at him.

Bloodlust! Sensing that, Zagan's consciousness was drawn over to the Sigil of the Archdemon on his hand. If this monster was an existence which conformed to the rules of a demon, then just like before, it may have been possible to send it away with a wave of his hand. And so, Zagan held out his right hand and yelled out.

“By this Sigil of the Archdemon, Zagan commands you. Oh grotesque being, return to your slumber.”

Answering his call, the Sigil of the Archdemon fired out an eerie light.

The demon Zagan had met before bent a knee and vanished upon being commanded in that manner. So, speaking to the one in front of him in the same way resulted in...

“Shit, it's no good. It's coming!” Zagan sharply clicked his tongue.

The mouth on the monster's forehead opened wide, and a destructive mana began to converge there.

An attack was coming. And as Zagan sensed that, he worried about what was behind him, and the first thing to catch his eye was Chastille who was... still standing in place.

This girl... She must know that she doesn't stand a chance without her Anointed Armor... Doesn't she fear death? Zagan reflexively grabbed the nape of Chastille's neck and jumped as he thought that. And that was why he overlooked the simple truth... He completely missed the fact that Chastille was covering for the young girl right behind her.

"Get out of the way, Foll!"

"Eh..." Foll stood stock-still as if completely puzzled. And the light from the monster's mouth shot right toward her.

The light pierced through where Zagan was just standing and mowed down Foll's figure. And right before that, Zagan thought he saw something hanging over Foll.

As the torrent of light settled down, the ground fused into a glassy surface. And within that hideously burned earth, a gaping section of stone surface remained safe. Most curiously, the shadows of two people also remained within it.

"U-Ugh..."

The one letting out a small groan was Foll, and the one hanging over her... was Raphael.

Everything from Raphael's left shoulder down was missing. The sight made Zagan seethe. Was that anger because he was unable to protect Foll? Or perhaps it was because his enemy, of all people, had been the one to save her?

In either case, it was enough of a reason for Zagan to swing his fist at it as the monster opened its mouth once more.

"...You good for nothing doll. Don't get carried away, you hear?" By the time he spat that out, Zagan already jumped high above the monster.

"I'll grind you to dust... Heaven's Scale!"

In the blink of an eye, 2000 circuits combined in Zagan's palm, and he spun together his firm shield in a violent manner.

Crushing that magic circle in his hand, Zagan then swung his fist straight down, and Heaven's Scale pulverized the monster's cranium, along with its mana gathering mouth to boot.

Even under normal circumstances, Zagan's brute strength could shatter rock, and now he added the strength of Heaven's Scale to his fist. As such, the destruction didn't stop at its head. It continued along the torso and split the monster right in half. The pieces which split off to the left and right were now nothing but stone, which slowly sank to their knees and fell over.

Soon after ascertaining its fate, Zagan ran over to Foll and Raphael who had taken on the brunt of the light.

“Hey, are you two alive?” As Zagan called out to them, Foll dimly opened her eyes.

“I’m... okay...”

Zagan didn’t understand what he was planning, but Raphael had used his body and Sacred Sword as a shield in order to protect Foll. The little girl didn’t have a single wound on her.

However, that didn’t apply to Raphael at all. And looking at his figure, which had his arm blown off along with his entire shoulder, made Foll let out a bewildered expression.

“You bastard, what are you planning?”

With his consciousness still seemingly intact, Raphael opened his eyes and spoke.

“...I only did my damn job. It has nothing to do with you.”

His wounds were far too deep and had probably paralyzed his sense of pain. The anguish in Raphael’s voice was faint.

However, it’s too close to his heart.

Zagan didn’t understand the theory behind Raphael’s healing ability, but the wound which blew away his left shoulder even reached his heart. The hemorrhaging was surely already a lethal amount. Even with the power of a dragon, Zagan didn’t think he could be saved. Or so he thought...

“Guh... Hngh...!” Raphael grunted, then stood back up.

He had sustained a fatal wound, discharged a large quantity of dripping blood that dyed his silver Anointed Armor red, and even had a deathly complexion on his face, yet he still stood tall.

Why was it that he had to stand up?

Even while vomiting out blood, Raphael opened his mouth to speak without losing his composure.

“You said... that I am Orobas’ damned foe, didn’t you?”

“...Th-That’s right.” Foll was terrified by the tenacity of the dreadful man, but she still managed to nod as she spat out those words. And in response, Raphael gazed straight at the young girl and told her the truth.

“That is a mistake. That great dragon... was nowhere near weak enough to fall to the likes of me.”

Zagan also held doubts regarding that matter. *The Sacred Sword is certainly a nuisance, but is it really something that can defeat a legendary dragon?* To be honest, he wasn’t even sure if all thirteen Archdemons together were powerful enough to do that.

Raphael certainly may have possessed power far outside the norm even for Angelic Knight, but if he was overwhelmed by Zagan, then he couldn’t have possibly killed Orobas. And, as if unable to accept that

reality, Foll howled at him.

“That’s a lie! I saw it. I saw you greedily devouring father’s husk! You’re the bastard who struck Father down with a sneak attack.”

“Then let me ask you... was the Orobas you know of... such a weak dragon that he would taste defeat at the hands of a few humans?”

“...At this last moment, do you still show contempt for Father!?”

“I’m saying that the bastard making a mockery of Orobas... is you...” Raphael said, his words bewildering Foll. However, he continued, “I do not give a damn what you think of me. However, I will say this for the sake of Orobas’ honor. That great dragon... in no way fell behind the lowly likes of we humans.”

“What... do you?”

At that, Raphael let out a quiet breath.

“That day, for the sake of butchering a certain enemy, I pleaded for the assistance of Wise Dragon Orobas. And he listened attentively to my wish.”

“Enemy...?”

Just what was this enemy the Angelic Knights were so desperate to strike down? *An Archdemon...? There’s no way, huh?* Zagan gulped and waited for Raphael’s next words with bated breath.

And before long, Raphael slowly turned his head. His eyes, however, were not looking at Foll, nor were they pointed at Zagan and Chastille. Instead, they were pointed further over at the stone Zagan had crushed.

“A demon... Within folklore, it is an existence referred to by that name.”

Foll opened her eyes wide at his words.

“Don’t speak such nonsense. I’ve never heard of such things existing.”

“Then, what is that? Is it not a monster that differs from things we have knowledge of?”

“Ugh... That’s...” Foll was unable to answer.

“I understand that you may not wish to accept it. After all, I also once believed that such things had left this world. However, in reality, a demon appeared in the present world, bringing about the deaths of many Angelic Knights and the great dragon,” Raphael said, practically spitting out blood in the process, and then uttered, “And in the not too distant future, they will return.”

Hearing those unbelievable words, Foll looked over to Zagan as if to cling on to him. And Zagan returned a straightforward nod.

“It’s the truth. I don’t know about them returning to this world or whatever, but demons truly do exist, even now. That’s why I’m investigating folklore to try and discover a means of killing them.”

It wasn't like Zagan sensed the tense situation that Raphael was talking about, but when the time came that he was forced to fight against such things, he needed a means to defy them.

Perhaps the fact that Barbatos was able to even summon a demon is an omen... Barbatos was certainly a sorcerer who possessed uncommon power, but the ritual at that time activated without even needing a sacrifice right as Zagan's power struck it, so it was incomplete.

A demon should not have been weak enough to be summoned by such half-hearted sorcery.

Even Foll likely knew that Zagan's words were the truth. They had been gathering nothing but books related to demons in the castle's archives, after all. However, she still looked up at Raphael like she still couldn't believe it.

"Then, are you saying father challenged a demon and was defeated?"

In response to that question, Raphael simply shook his head.

"He wasn't defeated. He merely traded his life for the enemy's."

That was simply rephrasing what she said. What differed, though, was that the dragon fought proudly in Raphael's mind, so those facts were passed along in his explanation.

That surely affected Foll greatly, as she tightly bit down on her lips and muttered something.

"...Then, just who... should I hate?"

"You should not hate, but be proud."

Foll knit her brows.

"Proud... you say?"

"That's right. Be proud. Orobas staked his life to protect you and the damned world you live in. If you do not boast of it, then who in the hell will?" Raphael exclaimed, then knelt down before Foll as he continues, "If killing me will make you regain your faith in Orobas, then do as you wish. I shall give this damned head to you."

Having sustained fatal wounds, Raphael looked down at his own body which continued to regenerate itself.

"The demons are mighty. If they are resurrected in this world where the church and the sorcerers quarrel, we have no way to prevail. We must prepare ourselves. That was why I despicably sipped on Orobas' blood and walked through that land of certain death."

That was surely the scene that Foll witnessed. And after saying all that, Raphael shifted his focus over to Chastille.

"However, my role has come to an end already. The seeds in the church are already budding. If my last duty is to be a parting gift to Orobas, then I can ask for nothing more."

Finally seeing where his story was going, Zagan opened his mouth to speak.

“Then, the envoy of the Unification Faction or whatever that Chastille mentioned really was you?”

Raphael quietly nodded.

“Indeed. While holding the status of an Archdemon and an Archangel, you bastards formed a connection, which is something exceedingly close to what I’ve been trying to do... That’s why...”

“Man, what the hell, none of this makes any sense!”

The one to speak out an objection at that point was Barbatos.

“Come on, let’s be real, you’ve killed *hundreds* of sorcerers but want peace? Who the fuck do you think you’re convincing here?”

Frankly, Zagan was of the same opinion. And surprisingly, Raphael nodded as if saying that he even understood that.

“I know that all too well. I cannot become the banner for unification. That’s why I needed the Maiden of the Sacred Sword.”

Chastille raised her voice in a fluster as such a preposterously important role was thrust onto her.

“W-Wait a minute. It’s not like I even accepted doing such a...”

Everyone present was unable to hear the rest of what she had to say, since with a clunk, the lump of stone that should have collapsed began moving.

When Zagan looked over to it, he noticed the monster that had been smashed in half was standing upright once more.



“Haaah... Seems there are immortal guys just scattered about everywhere, huh?”

Right after the Archangel who had his entire shoulder blown off came the monster of the preceding Archdemon’s legacy. Compared to those guys, Zagan was surely the one with more human weaknesses to him.

“I’ll take care of it again. Just give me a few.”

“Can you finish it off? That thing?”

In response to Raphael, Zagan shrugged his shoulders.

“Golems are out of my field of expertise, but if it’s something made by sorcery, I can break it.”

“That... is not a golem.”

Zagan knit his brows as he heard the utter conviction in those words.

“What do you mean?”

“That... is what you bastards would call a chimera. Aside from the golem given birth to by sorcery, it is also...”

And with that, Zagan felt a chill run down his spine.

“...No, it can’t be.”

“Just so. That is something Marchosias made, a chimera of a

demon.”

Zagan was unable to deny that claim. After all, when he first saw this monster, the thing that came to mind was a demon.

That damn Marchosias, what a nuisance! Raphael then focused on the monster with an annoyed look.

“There’s no mistaking it. That is the wreckage of the demon that Orobas and I defeated. Marchosias likely recovered it, and created that chimera.”

Wreckage was ultimately just wreckage. It was likely nowhere near its original power, but even so, it was still a demon. It only stood to reason that just smacking it wouldn’t bring an end to it.

Nevertheless, a smile crept up on Zagan’s face. *Just perfect. Shall I try testing out another ability?*

The stone monster, the chimera of a demon, had almost finished regenerating itself. And in response, Zagan wove the ‘Heaven’s Scale’ in his hand and stepped forth.

“Chastille, you should go as well.”

“I still... haven’t said anything about going along with what you said, you know?”

“However, you should already damn well know what you intend to do.”

Zagan couldn’t tell what they were talking about, but Chastille returned a straightforward nod and took up her sword.

“I don’t need you to tell me that. I shall wield my Sacred Sword as I see fit.”

And then, Chastille quietly chanted out.

“I shall no longer waver. So lend me your power— Sacred Sword Azrael!”

The Flames of Purification... were a light this time.

A pale light, which was not at all reminiscent of Raphael’s raging flames, coiled about the blade. However, it didn’t feel transient at all.

Zagan could tell that she was taking the same power that Raphael unleashed as a flame and focused it only along the length of the blade. It had a sharpness to it that could even cut through Heaven’s Scale.

This girl... When it comes to wielding the power of a Sacred Sword, isn’t she even better than Raphael? And as Zagan stared at her in wonder, Chastille stood next to him.

“I won’t ask you to believe in an Angelic Knight like me, but I want us... to fight together.”

Zagan simply shrugged his shoulders in response.

“I doubt you’re the type to try some underhanded scheme.”

After watching her pitiful appearance for the last few days, he could tell that even if he didn’t want to.

“Are you... praising me? Looking down on me?”

“Who knows.”

Chastille puffed out her cheeks sullenly at that response, then turned her head to the side in a huff and spoke.

“So, do you have any sort of plan?”

“There’s one thing I’d like to test out, but I’ll need a direct hit. I have to get right up in its face, you know?”

“Got it. Then, I’ll take on the role of the outrider.”

At that moment, the stone monster finally finished regenerating itself, and its googly and ominous eyeball turned toward them.

“It’s coming.”

“I know.”

And as the hideous mouth on its forehead opened, the light of mana once more began gathering. It was clearly the very same breath of light that struck down Raphael.

Zagan focused his attention on the people behind him. *If I dodge, then the two of them will get hit.*

Barbatos was out of the range of the light, but there were two others who weren’t.

It may have been possible for Foll to still evade, but Raphael couldn’t move a muscle. Besides, he didn’t like the idea of the attack being aimed at his daughter twice.

And, as Zagan put himself on guard, his field of view became obstructed with Chastille’s back.

“Idiot, you don’t even have your Anointed Armor on... You’ll die!”

“I will hold its attention, so don’t worry!” Chastille dashed forward as she yelled those words.

The monster’s breath shot forth. And that light ruthlessly annihilated Chastille’s body... Or well, it should have.

“HAAA!” Chastille swung down her Sacred Sword along with that spirited shriek. And the breath of light was split right in half by her blade.

Then, the light that split off to the left and right missed Zagan, Foll, and Raphael and vanished.

“Let’s go... Get moving, Zagan!” Chastille kept her pace and ran toward the monster as she threw those words out toward him.

Well, aren’t you just full of surprises? That strike just now left even Zagan astonished. Which made sense, since he couldn’t even see the moment she swung her sword.

Having said that, the difference in physical ability between Zagan and Chastille without her Anointed Armor was far too large. Zagan simply overtook Chastille in a single breath and entered the stone monster’s range in a flash. However, the stone monster swung out its arm to intercept him.

“It’s fast!” Barbatos let out a few dumbfounded words.

Contrary to the monster's large build, its speed was good enough to rival Zagan. *Luckily, the size leads to a bunch of wasted movements.*

It was a long sweeping strike, so Zagan had the time to thrust out his fist to meet it.

The stone fist of the monster was smashed as if it were brittle, its fragments scattering into the air.

"What the...?" However, the one left reeling was Zagan.

The scattered stone fragments were connected by an eerie black haze. And that broken wreckage changed its movements in midair as if possessing a will of its own, raining down incessantly onto Zagan.

So this is the reason it returns to normal after being smashed!? The stone body was simply transient, as its real body was the black haze lurking deep within.

"Don't stop now, Zagan!"

Those countless stone fragments were smashed by a pure white light as he heard those words. They both came from Chastille as she finally caught up to Zagan.

By the time Zagan thought he saw a white streak run through a stone fragment, the next sword strike was already on its way. The number of strikes was easily in the double digits. And it was at such a high speed that one would think they were all occurring simultaneously. However, though the speed was fearsome, the truly terrifying thing was that those strikes came from behind Zagan and struck down objects in front of him. And yet, they never so much as left a scratch on him.

Instead of admiration, a cold feeling ran down Zagan's spine. *If she did this when we first met, wouldn't I be dead already?* If she had employed such swordplay when he first fought against Angelic Knight Chastille, Zagan would not have been able to put any of his techniques to use.

However, right now she was an ally he was entrusting his back to. And so, Zagan gripped Heaven's Scale he wove in his hand, layering on yet another framework of circuits to it.

"Burn to ash— Heaven's Phosphor!" And then, Zagan knocked against the monster's abdomen with a thud.

Yes, it was a fist which only amounted to a knock. It was a truly powerless attack unbecoming of Zagan, who was able to even crush stone with his fist. So, seeing that from behind, Chastille let out a flustered voice.

"Did you misfire?"

"...No, it's already over," Zagan calmly remarked. After muttering that and lifting up his right hand, Zagan clenched his fist as if he was crushing something with it. And immediately following that...

With a sudden flare, the stone monster was wrapped up by a black

flame. The flame had burst out for but a single instant. And, as it ran across the surface of the stone as if dying it, the flame vanished.

With that, everything had come to an end. The blackened statue crumbled without a sound. *No matter what regenerative power it has, once it loses its mana, it's simple stone.*

The broken fragments that spilled over transformed to dust and dispersed before touching the ground. And in the blink of an eye, nothing remained of the chimera.

As Zagan turned around, he noticed that Chastille was standing stock-still with her eyes wide open in shock.

“What... did you do?”

Zagan then wove together a magic circle in his hand to help explain the situation to her.

“There’s this sorcery called Heaven’s Scale, you see. This thing endlessly sucks up mana in its surroundings and continuously accumulates intensity as a shield, so all I did was reverse the effect and throw it into the enemy.”

“Reverse the effect...?”

“It endlessly sucks up mana in the surrounding area... and makes it combust. The reason the flame looks black is because the mana itself is burning.”

Heaven’s Scale and Heaven’s Phosphor... They were sorcery that utilized the same structure, two sides of the same coin so to speak. An anti-Sacred Sword, and anti-demon weapon. After obtaining Marchosias’ legacy, Zagan had focused all his effort into developing those techniques.

And it seemed the proof was in the pudding. After all, it possessed enough power to burn even a chimera created from the remnants of a demon to ashes in an instant.

If a human sorcerer took that blow, they would be helpless. And in fact, it was so fiendish a sorcery that if the other Archdemons were to find out about it, they would be forced to declare it a forbidden art.

“Still, it’s far too imprecise. If I don’t raise the efficiency, it likely won’t work on a real demon...”

The demon that Zagan had confronted possessed far more preposterous mana. As Heaven’s Phosphor was now, a real demon would most likely destroy the sorcery before being burned to ash. Just like how Heaven’s Scale was still incomplete, it seemed this one also still had room for improvement.

“You’re... a terrifying sorcerer...” Chastille spoke like she was trembling, but her voice made it seem more like she was in awe of him. And that was why Zagan responded in kind.

“Your skills aren’t all that bad either, Chastille.”

As he said that, for some reason, Chastille opened her eyes wide

and covered her face.

“...What?”

“No, it’s just... This is the first time... you’ve called me by my name... is all...”

“Is that so?” Zagan wasn’t really conscious of the fact, but now that she mentioned it, he realized he’d only ever referred to Chastille with ‘you,’ ‘that girl,’ or other things along that line.

“Well, sorry about that.”

“Y-You’re apologizing?”

“You’re Nephy’s friend, after all. I’ll at least pay you some respect.”

The manners of a sorcerer weren’t all that different from the dignity of a bandit, though.

Chastille then puffed out her cheeks and glared at him.

“I didn’t come here just for Nephy’s sake. I came... to fight alongside you...”

Zagan stared back at her in wonder as he heard those shocking words.

“Even though we’re a sorcerer and an Angelic Knight?”

“Yes, even though we’re a sorcerer and an Angelic Knight.”

Upon hearing Chastille’s reply, Zagan felt a sense of safety that he’d never once experienced before in his life. *Entrusting your back to someone certainly isn’t a bad feeling, huh?*

Even if it didn’t fit his nature, he was about to put those thoughts into words. However...

“Zagan!”

As he turned around at Foll’s cry, Zagan saw Raphael collapse in exhaustion.



“Seems I was able to bear witness to the fastest sword among the Archangels.”

Lying down on the ground, Raphael formed a grin. Even now, it was a ferocious smile that made it seem like he might attack at any moment, but he was actually just laughing.

“Don’t talk too much. I’m bad at anything related to healing.”

Zagan was giving Raphael first aid using sorcery, but the wound was too deep. At most, he could stop the bleeding. I seemed Raphael’s luck had run out, as the regenerative ability of a dragon was weakening, barely allowing him to keep hold of his last grips on life.

Eventually, Raphael spoke in a weary tone.

“Chastille. No matter what you think of us, your actions themselves have already become our banner. Those who sympathize with me... will surely become your allies from here on out...”

“Lord Raphael...” Chastille gazed at Raphael with a complicated expression on her face as she said that. And with a ‘however,’ Zagan cut in.

“Talking about the Unification Faction or whatever again, huh? Barbatos said as much earlier, but I just can’t see the point. If you’re saying that you need a banner or whatnot, why not do it yourself? You’re one of those damn Archangels, aren’t you?”

“If it was only within the church, then that would be fine. However, it is just as that man said. I have... killed far too many sorcerers. If I were to call on them to join hands after all this time, they would never consent.”

That was why he needed a person like Chastille. And Chastille was taken aback by that.

“Is that why you used Orobas’ name? Because you thought nobody would believe you?”

“Partially, yes. But also, my survival and the creation of the Unification Faction were Orobas’ dying wish. That is why his name is most appropriate as the leader.”

To this man, Orobas’ existence was just that absolute. And Zagan was able to understand that, but in the end, he wasn’t really convinced.

“Then why did you kill so many sorcerers in the first place? Did you have some sort of grudge or something?”

Zagan in no way planned to claim that sorcerers were virtuous. On the contrary, sorcerers were, without exception, all villains. He couldn’t think of a reason not to hate them, but even so, killing nearly 500 of them was no small feat. He had to have a reason.

However, nobody was able to predict Raphael’s answer to that question.

“I did not kill them because I wanted to. For whatever reason, sorcerers just kept attacking me.”

“What...?” Everyone in the room let out a befuddled voice at once. Raphael then muttered some words like he found it strange.

“I wonder why? All I did was attempt to have a gentlemanly conversation with them. Even when I showed them a smile to prove I wasn’t an enemy, those damn sorcerers didn’t listen at all and kept rushing at me. Of course I had to accept their challenges at that point, which always ended with me cutting them down.”

Not able to understand just what he was saying, Zagan was in complete shock.

“...Wait a sec. Weren’t you trying to provoke us back in that bar?”

“I simply intended to inform the bastard who was intimate with Chastille of the crisis that befell her...”

Zagan’s head began to ache. And at the same time, Chastille shook

her head in a bewildered state.

“H-However, when you first met me, didn’t you ask me how many sorcerers I killed...? Oh, don’t tell me that was just an act to hide that your true intentions?”

“What are you saying? You would serve poorly as a banner if you killed sorcerers as I did, would you not? And you replied that it was not a number to be proud of, which convinced me you were the one I was searching for.”

Chastille was left at her wits’ end after hearing that response and seeing the serious expression on his face. So, after that, she nodded.

“Now that you mention it, could it be that you were negotiating to have my Sacred Sword... Returned to me?”

“If an Archangel does not have a Sacred Sword, how can they protect themselves?”

It seemed that something similar had also happened with Chastille, so Zagan tried thinking back on his conversation with Raphael.

He had a roundabout manner of speaking, but it was certainly true that this man never once said anything about wanting to kill Chastille. Sure, he spoke of the church’s views, but that didn’t mean he agreed with them.

Well, if a sorcerer and Angelic Knight started acting all chummy, then it would end up with something like what happened to Chastille, huh? In other words, he was basically telling them to just sense his intent. Though it didn’t look like that at all, honestly.

“But can you really kill near 500 people like that?”

“It simply ended up like that as I was attacked day after day. And when the sorcerers stopped coming, the church dispatched me to yet another region.”

It seemed the cycle repeated itself as he kept changing locations, so the number had swelled up before he even knew it.

The story wasn’t very convincing, but Zagan could understand that it was done unintentionally. And, as one would expect, he let out a sigh.

“Think about your damn outward appearance. Anyone would think of you as an enemy if you act weird while looking like that.”

After Zagan pointed that out, Barbatos added on an ‘Eh, that coming from you?’ with an astonished voice, which made Zagan decide to smack him later. Then, he clenched his fist as Raphael slowly stood back up.

“Chastille... You should return to the church. I shall dispose of those who wish for your demise. I will surely be able to retain this life for at least that long...”

“Huh, do you know who the culprit is?”

“Let me ask you then, have you not realized the truth?”

It wasn't like she didn't have any ideas. And as she took in his words, Chastille's face had become notably pale.

Yes, with Raphael ruled out, there are few within the church who could be responsible.

Zagan wasn't well informed of the internal affairs of the church, but by process of elimination, only one person came to mind.

Finally, Raphael turned to face Foll.

“I promised to hand over my head to you, but I'll have you wait until then.”

Foll was unable to respond to his words. So instead of that, she threw him a question.

“...Just answer one thing. What kind of dragon was Orobas to you?”

Raphael quietly nodded in return at her words, then answered.

“A great dragon. That moment I rode on that dragon's back and fought alongside him... was the best time of my life.”

“...I see.”

And as Raphael left, Foll did not try to detain or kill him.

“Is that alright?”

“...I don't know. But... I don't know... if it's correct to kill that man, either.”

Zagan gently brushed the young girl's head to comfort her.

“Then, isn't it fine to leave it at that?” Zagan questioned as he held his hand out to Foll, then said, “Let's go back. Nephy must be tired of waiting.”

“...Uh, mm.”

Even Zagan didn't know whether it was correct to give up on her revenge. But still, he could tell Foll no longer held a deep-seated disdain for Angelic Knights.

That's why... it's surely fine like this.

It was possible that her hatred would resurface after all this. In fact, he was certain that she would waver eventually, too. Nevertheless, Zagan and Nephy had decided to stay by this girl's side.

And at that point, Chastille spoke up.

“Ummm, what about me?”

“Go back to your damn church, pony head,” Foll said, driving Chastille to the verge of tears due to her naked hostility.

Somehow, before anyone realized, Barbatos had vanished. They had to take a long trek back to Zagan's castle due to his absence, and dawn was already breaking before they arrived. And yet, Nephy was still there, seemingly waiting to greet them.

“Welcome home, Master Zagan, Foll, Chastille.”

And on that very same morning, Zagan and the others would hear

of Raphael's fate.



"I see. So Chastille's whereabouts are still unknown..." Cardinal Clavwell muttered that as if in grief after receiving a report from Chastille's subordinates, the Knights of the Azure Sky.

"My deepest apologies. We have been nothing short of inadequate."

"It is not as if it is a fault of yours. I am the same in that I am anxious about Chastille's safety. For now, please rest."

"Ha!" With a bow and that spirited cry, the three knights left Clavwell's office.

As the door closed, Clavwell let out a sorrowful voice as if he was no longer able to endure it.

"Oooh... Chastille, my dear knight... Why... Why won't you just die for me?"

The face that was peeking out from both his hands was one that was repulsively warped.

"Sorcerers are evil. And those who are complicit with them are evil. If an Archangel is steeped in sin, then their replacement must enforce true justice in the place, right?"

If Chastille were killed, the Sacred Sword would choose a new, pure wielder. And this time for sure, he would raise them as the incarnation of justice.

What he was scrupulously concealing was the fact that this was not even the first time Clavwell tried to assassinate an Archangel. Those who did not demonstrate the absolute power of the sword of justice, those who objected to Clavwell's inclinations, those who felt hesitation in killing sorcerers, and those simply unworthy of being an Archangel were mercilessly cut loose.

Fortunately, Kianoides was the domain of the preceding Archdemon, Marchosias. If they were directed to that devil, then nobody would doubt their death.

This was not a defeat for the Sacred Sword. Because the wielder was unsuitable, they were unable to utilize the true power and perished as a result.

That, in itself, could also be called the will of the Sacred Sword. However, the circumstances this time were a little different.

"That damn Raphael just had to do something unnecessary..."

Chastille had foolishly said that she didn't want to fight against the Archdemon. As such, they immediately confiscated her Sacred Sword, and the preparations for holding a ceremony for a grand execution were well underway. The reason it was delayed... was because there were objections from the other cardinals.

Yes, Clavwell was not protecting Chastille in the least. It was only because the other cardinals were stopping him that she was protected. And that Chastille... had taken her Sacred Sword and gone missing.

You unruly wench... Are you saying you didn't die from that poison? It was his treasured poison, which was produced for the purpose of torturing captured sorcerers. There was no way Chastille should have been alive after taking in something that was fatal to even the most powerful of sorcerers. And yet, neither her corpse nor the Sacred Sword had shown up anywhere.

If Raphael didn't suggest returning the Sacred Sword to her, then none of these troublesome matters would have occurred and everything would have been settled cleanly.

"Those three stupid knights are also useless."

Those three blindly served Chastille. That was why he had them monitored, thinking that they would surely be able to find where Chastille was, but all they did was wander around town in a mess. No matter how much time passed, they never found her.

Or perhaps... they noticed they were been watched? Despite appearances, those three knights were ranked among the double digits as far as warriors in Kianoides were concerned. Even during the incident on the day Zagan succeeded Archdemon Marchosias, the three knights took chase after Chastille, and were said to have succeeded in rescuing her.

So, the logical explanation for them putting in so little work was that they noticed they would guide an assassin over to Chastille.

He had to think of another hand to play. And while he was groaning over such unpleasant thoughts, someone knocked on his door.

"...My apologies, I wish to be alone right now. Please leave what you need for later."

It wasn't that bad, but since he was high strung from anger, he didn't feel like he could calmly talk with another person. However, despite his instructions, the door to the room was violently kicked open.

"I'm coming in, Clavwell," a booming voice echoed, and the one who appeared was none other than the giant Angelic Knight Raphael.

"Wh-What are you...? You insolent knave...!" Clavwell raised his voice in equal parts fear and irritation, then immediately noticed something strange. Raphael was covered in blood. One of his arms was missing, and it was such a serious wound that his continued survival was nothing short of a miracle.

"Lord Raphael, just what is that wound...? No, putting that aside, we must treat it!" Clavwell quickly slipped some poison into his hand as he exclaimed those words. He didn't know what had happened, but

this man was one of the ‘evils’ that Clavwell had to exterminate no matter what.

Clavwell wasn’t sure exactly what his objective was, but he knew Raphael was trying to build up a new force within the Church. It was called the ‘Unification Faction’ or something, and if Clavwell were to find out they were a group who was against everything he stood for, he would likely not have made this choice. Still, whether it was good or bad fortune, those who could imagine Raphael’s ideology judging from his outward appearance did not exist in the church.

Raphael then plunked down in the chair in front of Clavwell.

“What, don’t worry about it. I just came here to take care of some minor business. I’ll leave right away.”

“H-However...” And just as Clavwell said that and smothered the poison on his glove, reaching out to plaster up Raphael’s wound with it...

“Huh...?” With a dull rolling sound, his arm tumbled across the floor.

“Unfortunately, I don’t have particularly enjoy the idea of a hand smeared in poison touching me.”

At a speed far faster than Clavwell could perceive with his eyes, Raphael severed Clavwell’s right arm from his body.

“Ghhh... Urk?” And as he squatted down and began screaming, a foot covered in armor was jammed into his mouth. Several of his smashed front teeth scattered about the floor.

“Don’t make such a fuss. Even though I may appear ruthless, this is the first time I’ve killed a human, you see? I’m just a little nervous about it.”

Why... me? He couldn’t speak those words aloud, but as Clavwell complained with his eyes, Raphael got the message loud and clear and replied.

“Both you and I have gone senile. It is not our place to stick our hands into each and every little thing the younger generation is doing. That is to say nothing of nipping their possibilities in the bud, of course,” Raphael said, then drew his Sacred Sword.

“You get to meet your end on the blade of your beloved Sacred Sword, bastard. How about making a somewhat happier face?”

“Aggggggh!” Opening his eyes wide, Clavwell tried to shake his head but could do nothing with the leg guard dug into his mouth.

Somebody save me! Why was the Archangel of Kianoides not coming to save him? What happened to the three knights he just sent away? As the spokesman of God, the executor of justice, why did he have to have his life threatened by such an ‘evil’? However, no matter how much Clavwell wailed in his heart, the ‘justice’ that he believed in did not protect him.

“I will follow you shortly. Wait for me in hell,” were the last words the man known as Cardinal Clavwell heard as a Sacred Sword came swinging straight for his neck.

And that was the very last scene Clavwell ever witnessed in this world.

Epilogue

“...I see. Like I thought, the culprit was Cardinal Clavwell, huh?” In a guest room of Zagan’s castle, Chastille muttered those words in a somewhat lonely tone.

Other than her, Zagan, Foll, and Nephys were all gathered in the room where Zagan had just informed her of Clavwell’s death. The one who tried to assassinate Chastille was none other than her superior, Cardinal Clavwell.

“That man... was one who never doubted the justice of the church.” That’s why he was fixed upon the idea that sorcerers were evil, and even considered Chastille, who made friends with one, to be an enemy.

Nephys then timidly posed a question.

“Chastille, did you know already?”

“Vaguely, I suppose. I had a feeling... but I didn’t want to believe it. Still, it makes sense since he was the one who greeted me and poured me some tea just like always.” That seemed to be why Chastille drank the poison without a shred of doubt.

Zagan then let out a snort with a ‘hmph.’

“How foolish. There are no decent humans among a group who proclaims to represent true justice.”

“Even before, you said something like that, huh?”

That was something that happened when they first fought. And as one would expect, in a dispirited state, Chastille slumped her shoulders.

“Even so, people want to believe what they’re doing is correct. I wonder... is that such a bad thing?”

“Believing that is up to them. However, the moment they believe it may be wrong, they will definitely waver. In that sense, the culprit who tried to kill you is correct. He never wavered in trying to kill you, after all.”

That was all justice came down to in the end. It was something people believed in wholeheartedly, which they would never waver from. When blind faith got too far, it always became fanaticism. The reason the church was strong... was because that lied at its foundation.

“You’re as harsh as always, aren’t you?” Chastille said as she formed a bitter smile, but it was not the face of one stricken with grief. And after taking a sip of the tea that was prepared for her, she

stood up.

"I'm going to return to the church. I think the current state of it is strange. I won't say something conceited like I'll correct it, but I want to change it even if just a little."

"I see."

And with that short reply, Chastille once more formed a bitter smile.

"Even at times like this, that's all you'll ever say to me, huh?"

Zagan felt like he did something bad as he heard those words. Her accusation of him being heartless had come far too late, but having it said to his face still made him worry about it. And that was why Zagan pointed over to Chastille's cup.

"Truth be told, that tea is poisoned."

"Eek?" Chastille raised her voice in a panic, looking fully ready to drop her cup.

She really is someone who gets easily shaken, huh?

After gazing at her panicking figure for a while longer, Zagan spoke to her in a tone that made it seem like he was confused by the fuss.

"...I'm kidding. Learn to doubt what others are telling you a little."

Well, even without Zagan telling her, Chastille likely knew it was a joke. And after holding her cup normally again, she glared at him fixedly.

"...No matter how you put it, wasn't that one just now in bad taste?"

"You think?"

"Of course it is. This tea... it was made by Nephy, right? And I was just about to spill it all over, you know?"

Upon hearing those reproachful words, Zagan tilted his head to the side.

"Nephy isn't... the one who made that tea, you know?"

"Eh? Wait, really...? Then, who made it?"

"Who knows," Zagan shrugged to dodge the question, but naturally, he didn't know how to make tea at all.

And while Chastille remained bewildered, she shifted her focus over to the only other one in the room, Foll. Well, it was possible that Nephy taught her how to make tea, but it wasn't likely that she would pour some for Chastille. Even Chastille surely knew at least that much herself. Still, in order to confirm the situation at hand, she knelt down in front of the young girl.

"In the end, I never got to have a proper talk with you, huh?"

Chastille claimed, then stretched out her hand to try and touch Foll's head. Unfortunately, Foll immediately ended up hiding behind Zagan.

"Haha, ha... Well, looks like it'll be difficult to get along,"

Chastille laughed, clearly full of mirth, then stood back up.

“Come... again... Chastille,” Foll spoke in a quiet, nervous voice. And as she suddenly started sobbing loudly, tears welled up in Chastille’s eyes in response.

“Hic... F-Finally... You finally called me by my name!”

“So in the end... you’re crying?” And with that, Foll also let out an exasperated sigh.

When her tears eventually stopped, she started to walk out of the room.

“It was only for a short period, but I’ve been in your care. I don’t know if I can carry the burden of Lord Raphael’s Unification Faction, but I will exert myself just a tiny bit in order to create a world where you can live more peacefully.”

And then, a hoarse voice hung over her.

“I see. So you’ve finally made up your mind.”

“I think it is beyond my means, but I’ll do my best nonetheless.”

“If something troubles you, you may call for my assistance anytime. Since I am one-handed, what I can do is limited, but I will still lend you my strength.”

The owner of that voice, who entered the room without a sound, was missing an arm and carrying a tea set.

“I am in your debt, Lord Raphael...?” Chastille started speaking, then suddenly raised her head in confusion. And loitering before her eyes... was a giant man that most would have had to look up at.

“Is it alright for you to get up already, Raphael?”

Yes. The one before them was none other than... Archangel Raphael. And as thanks for treating his wounds, he prepared tea in the morning.

“Indeed. From the beginning, I had Orobas’ divine protection. If you even cast elven mysticism on top of that, such a shallow wound is not even worth mentioning.”

Despite that, the arm he lost could not be recovered, which greatly impacted Raphael’s power as an Angelic Knight. Pitying him for that, Zagan turned a fleeting glance toward him.

“Can you still swing your Sacred Sword with an arm like that?”

“I’m not yet at the point where I cannot fight. Besides, I am already old. The Sacred Sword will surely choose its next wielder soon enough.”

“I see. Then, until it does, I’ll be making full use of you.”

“Heh, the compensation for using me is quite high, you know?” That was likely his way of saying that he would be taking a salary. The way he worded it was certainly hard to understand, but honestly, Zagan and this man may have just been the same in that regard. Thinking of it that way utterly depressed Zagan, though.

“Wait, what are you two talking so calmly about!?”

Zagan then made a grimace.

“Blahblahblah, shut it. Do you have a problem or something?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I fully believed Lord Raphael had died...”

When they last parted, Zagan had thought much the same.

However, this man had faithfully presented his head out to Foll, so Zagan brought him over to the castle. Since Chastille had collapsed from total exhaustion, he never told her about it, though.

Zagan then pointed his finger at Raphael as spoke.

“Oh, come now. How else do you think I learned the details of Cardinal Clavwell’s death?”

“Wait, really?” Chastille questioned, clearly surprised.

If not for that, there was no way rumors of a cardinal’s assassination could make it out all the way to his castle. Even the church was surely scheming to conceal the scandal.

Chastille weakly sank to the floor as the truth dawned on her.

“Well, I’m rather relieved you’re still alive.”

“You’re still too damn naive. If you act like that, then you won’t even be able to complain if you’re cut down from behind, right?”

As he spoke in a tone implying that he was going to cut her down right there, Chastille’s face suddenly spasmed.

“Ah... You’re saying that acting so kind without knowing people’s true intentions could be the death of her, right?”

After Zagan calmly remarked on that, Raphael let out an exaggerated nod.

“As one would expect of my liege. The difference in your caliber is admirable.”

“No, even I get it more or less... Wait, my liege you say?”

Seeing Chastille completely shocked, Raphael nodded like it was nothing at all.

“Now that you mention it, I haven’t told you anything about it, I suppose. I have been hired as Lord Zagan’s butler. As of this day, I have retired as an Archangel.”

“EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEH?”

Plugging his ears at Chastille’s shriek, Zagan recalled the conversation he had with Raphael and Foll.

“Just as I promised, I have returned to present you my head.”

Sensing Raphael, who had used up all his strength at the entrance to the castle with Zagan’s barrier, everyone excluding Chastille ran out to meet him. And the very first thing that came out of his mouth as they did were those words.

This man was not the one who killed Orobas. However, it was also possible to call him the target of revenge. That was why Foll got to decide Raphael’s fate.

After worrying over it for a minute, Foll came up a rather unique answer.

“Then, exhaust yourself for Zagan and Nephy’s sake. That will be of benefit to me.”

And just like that, Raphael also ended up working at Zagan’s castle. *With this, my research into the Sigil of the Archdemon should progress rapidly.*

Zagan had acquired some knowledge regarding the Sacred Swords from Marchosias’ legacy, but as expected, there was a big difference between having the real thing and not having it. If he was able to decipher the crests engraved on the Sacred Sword, then one day he would likely also be able to identify the true nature of the Sigil of the Archdemon.

Besides, even without that, with the maintenance of the castle and the management of Archdemon Palace, no amount of helping hands were enough.

If it was a subordinate that he could put his trust in, then be they sorcerer or Angelic Knight, he had no complaints. *Plus, there’s more to someone than their first impression.* He knew that because if he hadn’t met Nephy, he may have ended up just like Raphael.

Foll then looked up at Raphael inquisitively.

“Need something?”

“Is not having an arm... inconvenient?”

“Hmph... It is not something for you worry about.”

“Hold on a sec...” Foll left Chastille’s room with those simple words. Chastille had said that she was returning to the church, but having lost her opportunity to leave, she awkwardly stood in place and twiddled her thumbs.

Before long, Foll returned. And in her arms was an enormous left arm made of armor. She had put it away ever since coming to this castle, but it was the papier mache armor that she used when taking on the appearance of Apparition Valefor.

“...Crouch down.”

“Hmm?” Raphael knelt down as he said that, puzzled by her actions, and Foll fit the armor around his left shoulder. Then, she muttered some phrases quietly, which made the empty armor shine with a pale light.

“With this, it should move.”

“Oooh...” Raphael let out a sigh of admiration.

It was the same sorcery that Foll used to manipulate the armor. And it seemed she made it so that even Raphael could use it.

“To think that aside from Orobas, I would be greatly indebted to his daughter as well. I shall devote this life to thee.”

“...That’s a bit much.” Though she turned her face away with a

huff, Foll cheeks were just slightly dyed red.

And then, Chastille let out a somewhat dissatisfied voice.

“Um... Then... the only one leaving... is me?”

“Well, that’s just how it is.”

“No, but...” Chastille was on the verge of tears once again despite the fact that it was her decision to leave in the first place.

And since he was left with no other choice at that point, Zagan opened his mouth to speak.

“It’s fine if you just come here whenever you want, right? Nephy and Foll would be glad.”

“...Me too?”

“You too, right?”

Foll was making a face as if she wouldn’t, but she didn’t say anything to deny his claim outright.

And even then, Chastille looked up at Zagan’s face.

“And you...?”

Since he never thought she would say such a thing, Zagan simply stared back in wonder. And after that, while scratching his head, he replied like it in a rather mundane tone.

“...Well, I wouldn’t mind mingling while drinking some liquor... is about what I think of it.”

With that, Chastille’s face became enthusiastically cheerful.

“Okay! I’m also going to do my best!” After saying that, this time, the Maiden of the Sacred Sword went off on her way.

“Seriously, what a noisy... Huh?”

While Zagan was saying that, Nephy stood next to him, but turned her face away in a huff for some odd reason. Her cheeks were subtly puffed out, and he could tell that she seemed to be somewhat miffed.

“Nephy?”

“Whatever do you need?”

“...Why are you so angry?”

Nephy tilted her head to the side as if she didn’t comprehend his question.

“Do I... appear angry to you?”

“I’m asking because you do...”

After Zagan said that, Nephy tightly embraced his arm as if she planned to trap him.

“Then, please figure out why.”

Two soft bulges were pushing against him. And from them, he heard the sound of her heart beating awfully fast. Also, the tips of her pointy ears were slightly red, and he could see that they were quivering as he looked on.

She’s angry, but expecting something too? Zagan worried over her difficult demand for a bit, and then touched her cheek.

“About last night, and how I left you behind... Sorry.”

Nephy stared back in wonder as if she was astonished, then nuzzled her face gently against his arm.

“...Master Zagan, that’s unfair.”

And so, was Zagan’s answer correct? Regardless of the answer, Nephy’s mood seemed to have drastically improved.

“...Raphael, I can’t see.”

“Hear me, Foll. This is still too damn early for you.”

Whatever the case, that exchange between the two of them could only be seen by the new resident of the castle.



Afterword

It's good to see everyone again. This is Fuminori Teshima speaking! I have come to deliver volume two of 'An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride.'

This time around, a daughter has been added into the hijinks of this awkward couple! And just like that, there's stuff like the young girl who's bad at expressing herself going 'Guess whooo' from behind, as well as the continued investigation into demons and the Sacred Swords. Plus, there's even a broken down female knight and a scary older knight getting saved or beaten up!

As for my plans from now on, I have some new works coming out next month, but I don't have much leeway with the pages this time around, so I'll omit the details.

Now then, allow me to give my thanks to everyone that I am deeply indebted to. To the one responsible for me, K. To the illustrator, COMTA. (Foll is too damn cute, I swear!) To everyone who took part in the cover design, proofreading, publicity, and such. To my children. And to you, my dear readers who have picked up this book. Thank you very much!

April 2017: On a Saturday where I can't really enjoy a day off
— Fuminori Teshima

Bonus Short Stories

Sweet Temptation

“What is this, I wonder?” Nephy tilted her head to the side as she picked up the bottle that the lord of the castle had brought back. It was still about half-full of liquid, and it showed signs of being uncorked once before. Removing the stopper, Nephy tried taking a light sniff of its contents and noticed a somehow unusual scent from the bottle. A stimulating sensation ran from her nose to her throat, though it also seemed somehow sweet.

“Is this... liquor?” It was a precious commodity in the elven village, so this was the first time that Nephy got a chance to see some up close.

“I must think of the perfect meal to match it...” Nephy decided to ask her friend Manuela about what kinds of food went well with liquor when she had the chance. For the time being, she knew that there were all sorts of varieties of liquor. And so that she could think of dishes that would go well with it, Nephy poured just a little of the liquid in the bottle out onto her finger in order to verify its taste.

“...Erk, ack... Ugh...” A burning sensation in her throat assaulted her before she actually got any kind of taste. It seemed that this liquor possessed particularly high alcohol content. Even though she barely had a drop, she was dizzy.

For now, I need to cork the bottle... She couldn't allow the liquor that Zagan had gone out of his way to bring back to spill away. And so, as she sealed the bottle back up, Nephy realized something. The bottle only had half its contents left. In other words, Zagan had already had some of it.

“Master Zagan's... unfinished drink...?”

So, just how did he drink it? When Zagan came back, he wasn't carrying anything like a glass, so perhaps he put his lips directly on this bottle? Nephy's heart throbbed, her head was in a daze, and her body was hot. Then, spontaneously, she touched her own lips.

“...Ah, just what am I thinking... I wonder...” Shaking her head, she pushed the bottle away. Still, if it was just a little, tiny bit, wouldn't it be fine as long as she wiped it clean afterward?

Nephy combed back her snow-white hair, then brought the tip of the bottle closer to her face even as her body trembled from immoral thoughts.

“Huh, Neph? You’re still up?”

Neph sprang up upon hearing Zagan’s voice come from behind her. And as she hastily sealed the bottle back up in a fluster, he peered in at her face.

“Huh...? Are you alright? Your face is real red, you know?”

“Awawa, i-it’s nothing!”

She was burning up, and though she had already sobered up, for a short while, Neph was unable to look directly at Zagan’s face.

Just a Sip

“What’s... this?”

Dawn. Foll tilted her head to the side as she looked at a bottle left in the kitchen. Neph had likely put it there. Foll had been helping Neph in the kitchen every day, but she never noticed it until now. And upon popping it open to take a look, a somehow sweet yet sharp scent wafted up to her nose.

“...It smells nice. A drink?”

A gulp rang out from her throat. The young Foll didn’t know, but it was a strong liquor that could render an ordinary person unconscious with but a single glass.

“A sip should be fine...” Foll swiveled her head about and looked at her surroundings, and after confirming that nobody was around, she tried pouring some out into a glass. The golden liquid looked like honey, making it even appear sweet to the eyes.

“What’s this...? It’s amazing...” Foll stuck out her tongue and lapped up some of the liquid, finding it to be an unexpectedly stimulating drink. The area from her throat to her chest became hot, and it felt like her entire body was stimulated. And just like that, the glass ended up empty.

“Wow...” Foll unintentionally let out an amazed yelp. Her vision was shaking and twirling about. However, it was strangely not an unpleasant sensation. On the contrary, it was so pleasant that she felt she would burst into laughter at any moment.

“Seems like something... Father would like.” Foll suddenly became sad as she unintentionally spoke those words. Her father was no longer around. She became a sorcerer to avenge him, but even that wasn’t enough to bury the sadness she felt. As she mulled over such thoughts, Foll left the glass behind and tottered out of the kitchen. And the place she naturally headed toward... was the throne room where the lord of the castle, Zagan, spent most of his time.

“...Hm? What do you need at this hour, Foll?”

“Can’t sleep.”

She was unable to say that she got lonely and came over. Zagan

let out a small sigh upon hearing her reply, but didn't turn her away. And as Foll plopped down in front of the throne, she leaned on Zagan's lap.

"Hey, this smell... It can't be... Did you drink some liquor?"

"Liquor? I just had some juice in the kitchen."

"Juice, you say...? Haaah... That was fine liquor, you know?"

Zagan gently brushed Foll's head as he said that, despite his rather wistful tone. And finding his hand pleasant, Foll's eyes naturally closed.

"...Raising a daughter is quite a lot of work, isn't it?" Foll felt like she heard him say such a thing, but she had already drifted away into the land of dreams.

The Third Victim

"Nephy... isn't here, huh?" Chastille peaked into the kitchen wanting to ask where to throw out the trash, but nobody was there. Currently, due to certain circumstances, she was living in Zagan's castle.

"Is she out? What to do..."

The castle was quite enormous. Moreover, if Chastille walked around, there was a high probability of her triggering some sort of trap, so it was difficult for her to search the place.

"I've got no other choice, then. Guess I'll just wait here."

It was almost noon, so Nephy was sure to return before long. Chastille then noticed an aroma hanging in the air. Taking a closer look, she saw a bottle and a glass left on the table. There was a little bit of liquid inside the glass as well, and its color resembled honey.

"Liquor...? I don't think Nephy drinks, so is it Zagan's?"

With no particular intent in mind, Chastille picked up the glass. Over the past few days, she had been going through nothing but horrible experiences. Zagan was... Well, setting that aside, Nephy always treated her kindly, but emotional scars were not easy to heal. That was why Chastille leaned back and gulped down the liquid left in the glass, which couldn't have been more than enough to fill a spoon.

"...Mmm, that really hits the spot!" It wasn't the first time she had anything alcoholic, but she'd never had something so delicious before.

"J-Just a little more's fine, right?"

The bottle was still a third full. Taking a survey of her surroundings, Chastille didn't sense anyone else around. There also didn't seem to be any signs that anyone was just playing a prank on her.

"Whatever, I'll just have another sip!"

After filling up the glass halfway, she knocked back a second cup.

After that, a burning sensation flowed from her throat down to her chest, and her body got hotter.

“Hnnngh, that damn Zagan, keeping such a tasty drink all to himself... Uh, huh?” Chastille’s vision began to twirl about. Seemed it was liquor that was strong enough to knock an ordinary person out with just a single glass.

“Haaah...”

The floor... is cold... My body... won't move... Am I... dying?

As Chastille collapsed in tears, she heard Zagan’s panicked voice.

“Hey, crap, are you alright...? Haaah, even you ended up drinking some?”

Chastille’s body stiffened up, thinking he would get angry at her, but instead her body gently floated into the air. Zagan was carrying her in his arms. She ended up showing him her pathetic side once more, but regardless, Chastille was just a little happy about how it all turned out.



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by Fuminori Teshima

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